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# THE PLEASANT STREET PARTNERSHIP

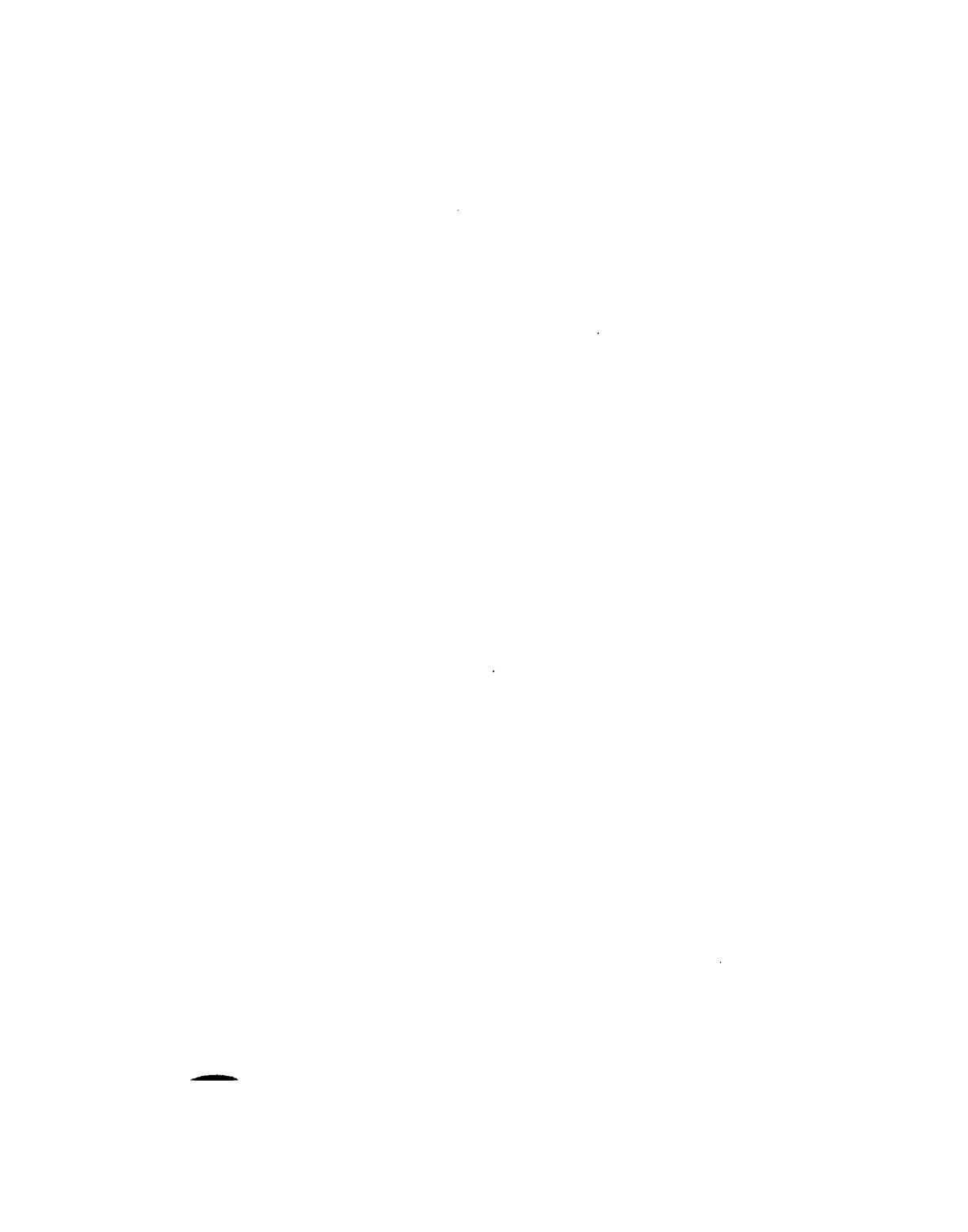
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A SMALL BOY . . . STOOD SURVEYING THEM  
WITH GREAT COMPOSURE

The  
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*A Neighborhood Story*

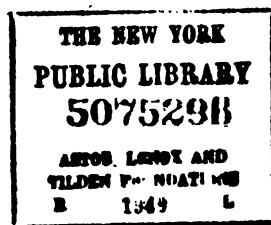
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By  
Mary F. Leonard

*Illustrated by*  
Frank T. Merrill



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THE PLEASANT STREET PARTNERSHIP.

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To Charlotte



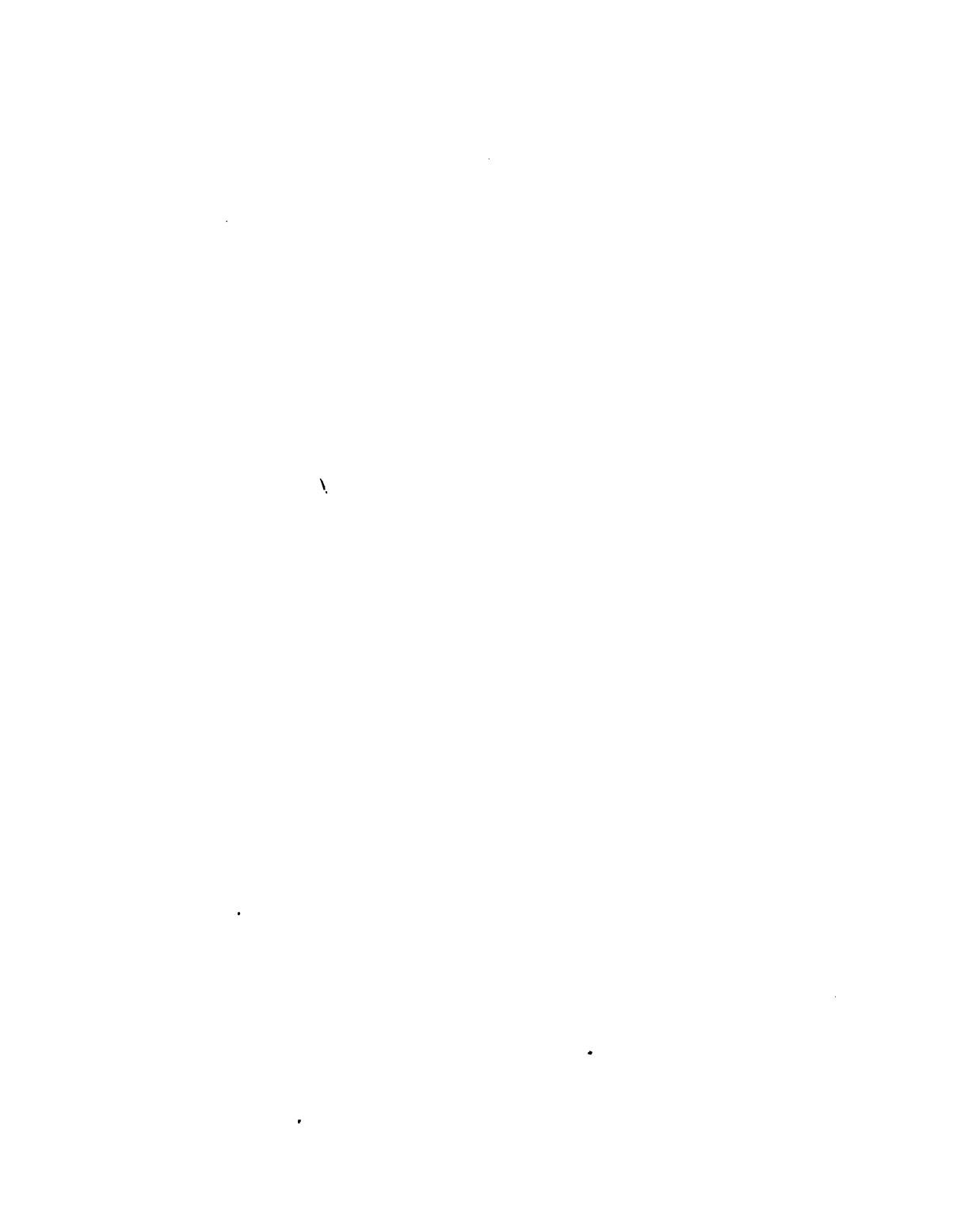
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# The Pleasant Street Partnership

## *A Neighborhood Story*

### CHAPTER FIRST

#### A WAVE OF IMPROVEMENT

PLEASANT STREET was regarded by the Terrace as merely an avenue of approach to its own exclusive precincts. That Pleasant Street came to an end at the Terrace seemed to imply that nothing was to be gained by going farther; and if you desired a quiet, substantial neighborhood,—none of your showy modern houses on meagre lots, but spacious dwellings, standing well apart from each other on high ground,—you found it here.

It could not be denied that the Terrace was rather far down town. Around it the busy city was closing in, with its blocks of commonplace houses, its schools and sanitariums, its noisy car



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lines, until it seemed but a question of a few years when it would be engulfed in a wave of mediocrity. Fashion had long ago turned her face in another direction, and yet in a way the Terrace held its own. It could boast of some wealth, and more distinguished grandfathers were to be heard of within its small area than in the length and breadth of Dean Avenue.

Its residents felt for each other that friendliness born of long association. Some of the best people of the town had built their homes here between thirty and forty years ago, and a comparison of directories would have shown a surprising proportion of the old names still represented.

Perhaps no one thing contributes more to a sense of dignity than long residence in one house, and it was natural enough that the Terrace should shrug its shoulders at the row of toy dwellings that sprang up almost magically on Pleasant Street. That this thoroughfare, so long given over to side yards and vacant lots, was showing a disposition to improve, was a matter of no concern to the Terrace until unexpectedly its own territory was invaded.

On the northeast corner of the Terrace and Pleasant Street there had long stood a cottage. In the midst of a large lot, with fine shade-trees around it and a beautifully kept lawn, it had never seemed out of place among its more pretentious neighbors; but now upon the death of its owner the property was divided into three lots and offered for sale. What this might mean was at first hardly realized, until one day men were discovered to be at work on the corner, digging a foundation.

Upon inquiry it developed that a drug store was to be built. The neighborhood did not like this, but felt on the whole it might have been worse,—this conclusion, as Wayland Leigh pointed out later on, being founded on the mistaken hypothesis that all drug stores are pretty much alike.

It happened that the druggist had for a brother a young and aspiring architect, who conceived the idea of putting up a building in keeping with a residence district. The result was a sloping-roofed structure whose shingled second story projected over the first, which was of concrete. It might have been a rural station, or post-office,

or a seaside cottage, but a drug store it did not remotely suggest.

The store opened on Pleasant Street; to reach the private entrance you must go in from the Terrace, where there was a square of lawn and a maple tree, relic of better days.

The worst of it was its utter incongruousness, the best—so Alexina Russell said—that it invariably made you smile, and anything in this weary world that caused a smile was not wholly bad. Miss Sarah Leigh pretended to admire it, and declared she wanted to meet the architect. Of all things she liked originality. Mrs. Millard heard her disdainfully. Any departure from tradition was objectionable in her eyes, and she was deficient in a sense of humor. Judge Russell complained that now St. Mark's had taken to high-church customs, and the Terrace was degenerating, it was time for him to be put away in Spring Hill Cemetery.

Pretty Madelaine, his granddaughter, looked longingly toward Dean Avenue, being divided between a desire for its new splendors and a complacent consciousness that it was something of a distinction in these days to live in the

house where your father was born. Alexina, her sister, treated this with scorn. She loved the shabby old house for other reasons.

In spite of the original intentions of the builder, fate decreed that this much-talked-of place was not to be a drug store after all, and early in the summer, before it was finished, it was advertised for rent.

The plastering stage was beginning when the agent in charge one day appeared conducting a young woman over the premises. If the agent's manner revealed some slight curiosity concerning her, it was not to be wondered at, for it was more than probable he had never before seen so charming a person in the guise of a possible shopkeeper.

Her bearing was dignified and businesslike, and if a smile hovered about her lips as they explored the odd little house, it did not go beyond the bounds of a polite interest. At length she seated herself on an empty nail keg in the shop, and became absorbed in thought. The agent leaned against the door frame and waited.

"I shall want a few changes made if I lease

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it," she announced suddenly, after some minutes of silence.

The agent started as her eyes met his. "Oh, certainly," he replied, as if ready to agree without hearing what they were. On second thought he added that the architect was at that moment coming up the street, and the best plan, perhaps, would be to submit her wishes to him.

To this she graciously assented, and he left her. When he was gone, the young woman's dignity relaxed. She smiled broadly; she even laughed. "How ever did it happen!" she exclaimed.

She produced a tape-line and made measurements, then she stood with the tip of her tongue touching her upper lip. "I do wish Marion could see it," she said. "She will never believe what a fascinatingly funny place it is."

She was surveying the neighborhood from the front door when the agent returned, accompanied by the architect.

She wanted very little, she announced reassuringly; a fireplace in the shop was the chief thing.

The agent suggested that it would be far

more expensive to heat the room with an open grate than with an anthracite base burner. Whereupon she explained that an open fire was part of her stock in trade, and it would be impossible to carry on her line of business without one.

The agent ventured to inquire what her line was, and she answered with a twinkle in her eye, "Notions."

The architect was doubtful about the fireplace, but not unwilling to discuss it, and they grew so friendly over the matter that the agent retired to the door and stared gloomily up the street.

From the fireplace the discussion turned to other things. As a possible tenant, the young lady consulted the architect about the best color for the walls, so adroitly insinuating her own ideas as to the proper stain for the woodwork that they seemed his own.

While they talked, a small boy in a gingham apron, with a sailor hat on the back of his curly head and a gray flannel donkey under his arm, wandered in and stood surveying them with great composure.

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"Who's going to live here?" he presently asked, his brown eyes upon the lady.

She met his gaze with a smile that drew him a step nearer, but caused no break in his seriousness. "I am thinking of it," she said, adding, with a twinkle of mischief in her eyes, "if they will let me have a fireplace in this room. Shouldn't you want a fireplace if you were going to live here?"

He nodded. "'Cause if you didn't, Santa Claus couldn't come."

The lady turned gravely to the architect. "That is a consideration which had not occurred to me, but it is an important one. I shall not take it without the fireplace." Her manner said there was no need for further discussion.

"What is your name?" she asked the small boy.

He shook his head.

"Do you mean you haven't any?"

Another more vigorous shake.

"Perhaps you have forgotten it?"

"No, I haven't."

"Why not tell, then? I am always willing to tell mine."

"What is it?" he inquired with great promptness.

"But I don't think it is fair to ask me when you won't tell yours."

"You said you would."

The lady laughed. "Very well, I am Miss Pennington."

The small boy pondered this for a moment, then announced with much distinctness, "My name is James Mandeville Norton."

"Well, James, I am glad to meet you. I see you are a fair-minded person. Do you live in this neighborhood?"

James Mandeville pointed in the direction of the row of toy houses on Pleasant Street, and said he lived over there.

"Then if they give me a fireplace, you and I will be neighbors."

They were standing in the door, just outside which, on the sidewalk, was a velocipede. This James Mandeville now mounted with gravity. He did not express a hope that she might come to live near him, but there was friendliness in the tone in which he said good-by as he rode away.

"Good-by Infinitesimal James," replied the lady.

"My name's James Mandeville," he called back.

In the course of a day or two the matter of the fireplace was adjusted and the lease signed. Norah Pennington was the tenant's name, and her references all the most timorous landlord could ask.

On the afternoon of the day on which the transaction was closed Miss Pennington might have been seen walking along the Terrace, gazing about with interested eyes.

"What dear old houses," she said to herself. "I am sure Marion will like it here. This might be Doubting Castle, and there is Palace Beautiful, a little out of repair."

She stood for a moment on the corner in the full blaze of the summer sun. The happy courage of youth seemed to radiate from her. There was a vitality, a sparkle in her glance, in the waves of her sunny hair, in her smile, as with a slight gesture that embraced the Terrace, and Pleasant Street, too, she said half aloud, "Good-by till September."

## CHAPTER SECOND

### WHAT SHALL WE CALL IT?

"**A**ND now what shall we call it?" Norah asked.

"Call it?" echoed Marion.

They sat on the rocks beside a mountain stream that filled the air with its delicious murmur.

"Certainly, everything has to have a name. Shall it be *Carpenter and Pennington, Dry-goods?*"

Marion removed the dark glasses she wore, turning a pair of serious eyes upon her companion. "How absurd," she said.

"No," insisted Norah, taking the glasses and adjusting them on her own nose, "not at all. It is businesslike. Can't you see it?—a large black sign with gilt letters."

"Give me my glasses, and don't be silly. It is not to be a dry-goods' store in the first place,

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and above all things let us be original. If such signs are customary, ours must be different."

"Here speaks wisdom. Here the instinct of the born advertiser betrays itself. Let us think." Norah buried her face in her hands.

Marion watched her with a half smile, then as an expression of weariness stole into her face she restored the glasses and sighed, as with her elbow supported on a ledge of rock she rested her chin in her palm and looked down on the swift running water. She was extremely slender, and it was easy to guess she was also tall, and that, seen at her best, she was a person of grace and elegance rather than beauty.

"I have it," Norah cried presently. "*The Pleasant Street Shop.*"

"Or *The Neighborhood Shop,*" Marion suggested.

"No, let us have Pleasant Street in it. It seems a good omen that the street is called Pleasant."

Marion smiled. "Have you told Dr. Baird?" she asked.

"Yes. He said I should be a novelist, and confine my wild-goose schemes to paper."

"*The Notions of Norah* would be a taking title," laughed Marion, the weariness gone from her face.

"But as I told him, 'Deeds, not Dreams,' is my motto, and I'll show him if it is a wild-goose scheme. I am convinced that deep down in his heart he was interested; and although he made no promises, I believe we may count on him."

## CHAPTER THIRD

### AN ALIEN

WITH the swiftness of a small tornado, Charlotte descended the long, straight stairway only to sink in a heap on the broad step at the bottom. "Oh, dear!" she said, her chin in her hand, "Oh, *dear!*"

A ray of sunlight falling through the sidelights of the door with their pattern of fleur-de-lis on a crimson ground, cast a rosy stain on the neutral-tinted carpet and brought to notice a few atoms of dust on one of the rosewood chairs that stood to attention on either side of the tall hat-rack. The wall against which they were ranged was done in varnished paper to represent oak panelling, and on it hung one or two steel engravings.

"If only something were crooked!" Charlotte sighed.

Now at Aunt Cora's nothing was straight.

Etchings and water colors fought for the honors of the walls, and chased each other up the side of the stairway. Tables and shelves were crowded with trifles, costly and otherwise, the chairs were deep and cushiony, except now and then a gilt toy which was distinctly for show; the divans were smothered with gay pillows. In contrast this house in Kenton Terrace seemed unbearably stiff and prim.

Why had not Uncle Landor allowed her to stay with him instead of sending her so far away? Perhaps, after all, he had not wanted her. Nobody wanted her — dreadful thought! — unless it were Aunt Cora; and Charlotte knew in her heart Uncle Landor was wise in deciding she was not to travel about with Aunt Cora any more.

Since she had been taken away, a child of seven, her memories of this southern town had grown vague, and it seemed strange to hear Uncle Landor refer to it as her home. He also said it was the sort of a background she needed for the next few years, until she should be ready for college. After that he promised, if she still wished it, she might come and keep house for him.

But it would be so long. How could she stand it? If only she might have gone to boarding-school. Why had Aunt Caroline and Aunt Virginia agreed to her coming? They did not like her. Nothing she did pleased them. Charlotte looked about for a refuge where she might fling herself down and cry her heart out. She rose and stole on tiptoe into the drawing-room.

Here the same absolute order prevailed. She felt sure the carved chairs and sofas, with their covering of satin brocade, had occupied these same positions ever since they first appeared on the scene when Aunt Caroline made her *début*, more than thirty years ago. Fancy Aunt Caroline having a party! Aunt Virginia had described it to her, but it sounded unreal. Thirty years ago was too far in the past. Charlotte's own mother had been a little girl then.

The buhl cabinet near the window, the inlaid chess table in the corner beside the white marble mantel, even the folds of the handsome lace curtains, seemed petrified into their present positions. For thirty years the mantle mirror had been reflecting the Dresden clock and candelabra, and the crystal pendants of the chandelier; the face

and figure that confronted Charlotte in the pier glass was, however, something new and alien.

It was a brown face with blue eyes that danced with mischief or flashed with anger, or grew soft with entreaty beneath their black lashes, as occasion might demand. Her hair, too, was brown, and shadowed her face in a wavy mass held most objectionable by her aunts. That a girl barely fourteen should have decided views on the subject of dress, and insist upon wearing what she called a pompadour and having her belts extremely pointed in front, was surprising to Aunt Virginia, shocking to Aunt Caroline.

As she stood facing her own image, the sound of sweeping skirts on the stairway sent her flying behind the half-open door.

"What has become of Charlotte?" she heard Aunt Virginia ask.

"I am sure I don't know," responded Aunt Caroline.

"And what is more, you don't care," added Charlotte, under her breath.

When the door had closed behind them, she ran to the window and watched as they went down the walk and entered the waiting carriage.

Two very charming ladies, an unprejudiced observer might have pronounced them. A little precise in their elegance, perhaps, but pleasant to look upon, especially Aunt Caroline, from head to foot a shimmer of silver gray. Aunt Caroline was Mrs. Millard, the widow of an army officer, and Charlotte had expected to like her best; but after all, Aunt Virginia, who was only Miss Wilbur, had proved the least objectionable.

She was not so handsome, but seemed kinder; and when she laughed, Charlotte always felt a little thrill of sympathy. When Aunt Caroline laughed, it was in a reserved, controlled manner. Charlotte had arrived at the conclusion that Aunt Virginia stood in awe of her sister; and this might have been a bond of union if it had been possible to become really acquainted, but Aunt Virginia held aloof. It was almost as if she were afraid of Charlotte, too. Still there was something rather nice about her. Charlotte hardly realized how often she returned to this opinion.

When they had driven away, she went to the library,—a less formidable apartment than the drawing-room,—and making herself comfortable in an arm-chair by the window, began to consider

what she should say to Cousin Francis, for she had decided that pouring out her soul in a letter would, after all, be more satisfactory than tears.

She looked out across the garden to where, on the other side of Pleasant Street, stood the little corner shop with its gray-green shingles, its upper windows all aglow in the afternoon sunshine. Before it stood a furniture van, and Charlotte idly watched the unloading.

She had made up her mind that life here was going to be hopelessly dull. She swung her foot listlessly, and, forgetting her letter, thought of Aunt Cora's home in a gay little suburb where something was always going on,—teas, dinners, receptions, where, although in the background, she had had her share of the excitement.

At the Landors', where she sometimes spent several weeks while Aunt Cora, worn by her strenuous social life, went down to Atlantic City to recuperate, it was much quieter. And still she loved to be there. The elder Mr. Landor was a busy lawyer, his son Francis a literary person, and they lived in a tall, brown stone house in the old part of Philadelphia, among any number of others exactly like it. It was a

man's house, overflowing with books and pictures, and yet showing the lack of a woman's presence. Charlotte was very fond of her guardian and his son, who petted and made much of her on the occasions of her visits. She was conscious, however, that Uncle Landor was not quite satisfied with her. He had a way of looking at her long and steadily through his glasses, as if he were studying her.

Cousin Frank, perhaps because he had no responsibility in the matter, treated her as a comrade in a way that was flattering. She was, of course, an ardent admirer of his stories and verses, and upon one or two rare occasions had been made blissfully happy by being allowed to listen to one fresh from the typewriter. But most interesting of all had been a discovery made on her last visit in the spring. Between the leaves of a manuscript she had been allowed to read she found some verses beginning:—

“I love her whether she love me or no,  
Just as I love the roses where they blow  
In fragrant crimson there beyond the wall.”

There was something more about roses being sweet although out of reach, and teaching a les-

son to his heart; but before she had quite grasped the idea, Francis took the paper away from her with an exclamation of impatience.

"Why should Francis have minded, unless those verses meant something personal?" Charlotte wondered. As she thought it over, she recalled some remarks of Aunt Cora's about a little water-color portrait of a child in Uncle Landor's study.

"Who is this?" Mrs. Brent asked one day, pausing before it.

"That is old Peter Carpenter's granddaughter May, when she was ten years old. He had two portraits done of her, and liking the other better, gave this to me not long before he died."

Aunt Cora said, "Ah!" and studied it with interest. "So this is *the* Miss Carpenter, is it? I presume Francis has a more recent likeness."

"I do not know that he has. We see very little of May in these days. She is a great lady." Uncle Landor spoke as one who dismisses a subject.

Then one rainy afternoon Mrs. Wellington, the Landors' housekeeper, entertained Charlotte

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with stories of this same young lady who, it turned out, lived just across the street in a house distinguished from the rest of the block by a garden at one side. According to Mrs. Wellington she was beautiful and rich, and if one more touch were needed to make her an irreproachable heroine, the long illness from which she was then beginning to recover supplied it. Watching at the window, Charlotte had the pleasure of seeing her carried out for a drive once or twice, but she never had a glimpse of her face.

Putting two and two together, she became quite sure that this Miss Carpenter was the rose which was out of reach; but though she was on the point of it several times, she never quite dared to question Cousin Francis about her.

Charlotte had woven a charming romance with these slender threads, being at the romantic age when real life is seen beneath the lime-light of fairyland. Was it any wonder things seemed dull here in Kenton Terrace?

These entertaining memories being for the time exhausted, her thoughts turned to the grievance that had sent her downstairs with such vehe-

mence,— a thrilling, fascinating story taken from her at the most critically exciting point.

"I cannot allow you to read novels when you are going to school," Aunt Caroline had said; adding, "and this book is not at all the sort of thing for a little girl."

At the recollection Charlotte put her hand to her hair. Little girl, indeed! When people wished to be disagreeable, they reminded you that you were a little girl.

"I have always read what I pleased," she insisted, relinquishing the book unwillingly.

"I cannot understand Mrs. Brent's allowing it; but however that may have been, while you are with us your Aunt Virginia and I will exercise some supervision over what you read."

Questions about the owner of the novel followed, and here was another grievance. It had been lent to Charlotte by one of her schoolmates, a girl with fluffy yellow hair and many rings, whom after a week's acquaintance,—to use her own phrase,—she simply adored. Her name was Lucile Lyle—in itself adorable—and the intimacy with her had resulted in Charlotte becoming Carlotta.

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"Lyle?" Aunt Virginia repeated questioningly.  
"Don't you remember Maggie McKay, Virginia? This is her daughter," was Aunt Caroline's reply. To Charlotte she said, "To-morrow I shall give you this book to return, and while of course I wish you to be polite, I do not wish you to be intimate with this girl."

"I don't care what she says, I shall read it, and be as intimate as I please with Lucile," Charlotte told herself; which goes to show that Mr. Landor was right when he felt she needed different training.

And now having nothing else to do, she wandered to the piano, and finding an old music book, turned its pages, playing snatches of "Monastery Bells" and "Listen to the Mocking-bird." She was putting a good deal of feeling into "I'm a Pilgrim, and I'm a Stranger," when a sound behind caused her to start.

"You have a pretty touch, my dear," said Aunt Virginia. "We have been out to Marat's greenhouse, and I have brought you some roses." She laid them on the piano as she spoke, and slipped away before Charlotte could make any response.

Was it a peace offering?

## CHAPTER FOURTH

### MISS WILBUR

MISS WILBUR was perplexed to the point of annoyance, a state of mind most unusual with her.

She was by nature a serene person, quite content with her easy, uneventful life. The outside world she faced with a timid reserve which had not diminished with years and indulgence, finding her life in her family circle and the round of small cares, her flowers and her embroidery. She disliked responsibility, and except in what she considered matters of principle was inclined to distrust her own judgment. She was full of family loyalty, and had been satisfied to look on from her place in the background, while her more clever and ambitious sisters and brothers one by one passed from the home into the world.

Naturally enough she had not married. She had not cared to, and had never given any

one the opportunity to combat this indifference. Most people liked her, but she had few intimate friends, having apparently no desire to be singled out in any way, and yet she was warmly affectionate. In truth Miss Virginia was an elusive sort of person, sometimes allowing a glimpse of herself in all her unselfish sweetness, and then, presto! her reserve had taken alarm, the vision was gone.

She was conventional, made so by her environment; yet her failings, many of them, so her sister Caroline declared, were those of an untrained child. She was careless,—as Charlotte had noticed, she sometimes forgot the fastenings of her skirt; when she wrote, she invariably inked her fingers; and she was constantly losing or breaking her glasses. She treated these matters lightly herself, but tried to conceal them from her sister.

In their girlhood this sister, a few years older than she, had been the object of her deepest devotion. Caroline was beautiful and clever, and to question her opinions never entered Miss Virginia's mind. It puzzled and hurt her loyal heart that she could not quite get back to the

old attitude when Caroline returned to her home a widow. She submitted when Caroline assumed command of the household; but after their father's death relieved her of the position of devoted nurse, Miss Virginia found life a little empty; and what made it the harder was that she no longer felt herself altogether in sympathy with her sister's opinions and methods.

Her aspirations had never gone beyond making home pleasant for somebody, and now even this was taken from her. The things that most absorbed Mrs. Millard were of little interest to her; she began to feel useless and unhappy. She was a failure. Life had somehow slipped by unawares. She felt old at forty-eight.

Above everything she disliked change, and the sale of the corner lot and the building of the shop caused her many a pang. In the midst of all this disquietude Mr. Landor's letter arrived.

"I have most agreeable recollections of your home," he wrote, "and I realize I am asking a good deal of you, for our little niece is a somewhat tumultuous person. She has suffered from both over indulgence and neglect. She needs a different atmosphere, and much in the way of

training that her old guardian cannot give her, so he ventures for Helen's sake to ask if you will take charge of her daughter for a few years."

This half sister, twelve years younger than herself, had come and gone like some happy dream in Miss Virginia's life. She had grown up under the care of her grandmother, almost a stranger in her father's house, to which she returned in her gay young girlhood, and for the one time in her experience Miss Wilbur had been swept into a whirl of gayety as Helen's chaperon. Her charge had married early, and after a few years went abroad with her husband and little girl in search of health she was never to find.

The thought of Helen's child aroused memories both bright and sorrowful, but at least here was an opportunity to be useful again. It would be pleasant to have a child in the house, Miss Virginia thought, studying the photograph of Charlotte at seven, bright-eyed and demure.

The tall, well-grown girl had been a surprise to her aunts. Her assured manner and pronounced style of dress were not exactly what

one desired in a girl of fourteen. At sight of her Miss Virginia had been seized with a fit of shyness; in consequence the reins had been taken by Mrs. Millard, who was not shy and was, besides, a born manager.

Miss Virginia felt a sympathy for Charlotte, even while disapproving of her; she felt her sister to be too peremptory. In the matter of the novel it would have been better to allow Charlotte to finish it, with the understanding that it was to be the last. What could be more aggravating than to have to give up a story with only two-thirds of it read? It was an interesting story, too. Miss Virginia herself sat up till midnight to finish it. Some time perhaps she would tell Charlotte the end. Then she reminded herself that this would never do.

It was no use talking to Caroline, and yet Mr. Landor had asked *her* to take charge of Charlotte, and Caroline had no right to assume command. Miss Virginia wished they had not agreed to take the child.

She paced back and forth on the front porch one afternoon, thinking of all this and of the peaceful days of the past, feeling that dulness

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was better than problems like these. Across Pleasant Street was the little shop already showing signs of habitation. As she stood idly with her hand on the rail, a boy came up the walk and handed her what at first glance she thought was a note, but it proved on investigation to be an announcement.

THE PLEASANT STREET SHOP

WILL OPEN

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER SECOND

Dainty Turnovers	Pretty Draperies
Ribbons	Bright Chintzes
	Baskets
	Pottery
Needles and Pins and Other Small Matters	
A Specialty.	

"How absurd!" thought Miss Virginia. "A shop of this sort in the Terrace!"

"Have you heard about the new shop, Miss Virginia?" called Alexina Russell from the gate.

Miss Wilbur held up the card. "I am just reading the announcement. Who can be starting it? and isn't it too bad?" As she spoke, she descended the steps and joined the young girl.

"It is the funniest little place I ever saw," answered Alex. "I suppose it is not nice to have

shops springing up in the neighborhood, but—sometimes I wish I were going to keep a shop."

"My dear! I trust you will never have to do that."

"Haven't you ever felt that you would like to be doing something?—to be in things—part of the real working world?" Alexina spoke with fervor.

"I never wanted to keep a shop, I am sure," answered Miss Wilbur.

## CHAPTER FIFTH

### THE SHOP

JAMES MANDEVILLE did not forget the pretty young lady who said she was coming to be his neighbor if they would give her a fireplace. He had kept an eye on the shop all summer, and he knew there was a fireplace.

He saw plasterers, carpenters, and painters come and go as he rode back and forth on his velocipede at a rate of speed altogether out of proportion to the effort put forth by his plump legs, bare and brown above his socks. From beneath the brim of his old sailor hat he looked on with solemn intentness. He was on excellent terms with the workmen, and often carried home a whole armful of treasures—odd-shaped pieces of wood, curly shavings, and bits of tile.

At length all was done; the square of lawn on the Terrace side was sodded, and from the street in front of the shop all the débris was carried away. Surely, she would come now!

Some rainy days followed, and when the weather permitted James Mandeville and his velocipede to be abroad again, the place showed unmistakable signs of occupancy. There were muslin curtains in the upstairs windows, and, peeping in through the glass door of the shop, he saw packing-boxes. At another time a woman stood on the curbstone buying vegetables from a wagon, but she was far removed from the lady of his dreams. His heart fell.

The door of the shop stood open the next time he passed. James Mandeville halted, letting one foot slip along the pavement as a brake. Under his left arm, pressed close to his linen blouse, was a tin horn. At this moment a lady came to the door and looked out. She was not the lady of the fireplace,—a glance told him that,—yet she was quite different from the one who bought vegetables. She was tall and dark, and wore unbecoming smoked glasses. She took no notice of him, but turned and went back into the shop. James Mandeville dismounted and followed.

The packing-cases had been removed, and the sunshine that streamed in above the sheet tacked across the lower part of the west window lighted

up a scene of cheerful disorder, pervading which was a pleasant odor of newness. With her back toward him, the lady began to measure off lengths of some green fabric, standing before a long table.

He waited, but still she took no notice. Should he go away? He summoned all his courage and gave voice to the question that was asking itself in his own mind: "Where is she?"

The lady turned in surprise and looked down upon him. If he could have expressed his feelings, he would have said she was a haughty person. But as she looked at him her manner changed, and she smiled as she asked, "What is it? I don't understand."

James Mandeville struggled to reply, but words were hard to find. As he stood silent a voice behind him cried, "Why, if it isn't Infinitesimal James!" and there she was, with her shining hair and laughing eyes. He laughed, too, for very relief.

"There's a fireplace," he announced, going to meet her. "I saw them make it."

"So you knew I would come back, didn't you? Yes, it is a very nice fireplace, and will be all ready

for a visit from Santa Claus," she replied, shaking hands. Then quite unexpectedly she picked him up and set him on the table among the waves of green stuff. "Now you look like Triton," she said.

James Mandeville held fast to his horn and eyed his captor doubtfully, as if he had a mind to escape.

"Do you remember my name? I am Miss Norah, and I want to introduce you to my partner, who is almost as nice as I am. She is Miss Marion."

The other young lady smiled. "Do you believe in blowing your own horn, as Miss Norah does?" she asked.

James Mandeville looked at his horn, and then at the speaker; but as he did not understand, he made no reply.

"She asks foolish questions, doesn't she?" said Miss Norah. "As you are the first neighbor to call on us, you shall not be required to answer. You may help me trim the show window, if you like."

James Mandeville wriggled out from among the green waves. "What are you going to keep in your store?" he asked.

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The reply was disappointing. "Why don't you keep candy?" was the next question.

"Because Miss Marion would give it all away, and we shouldn't be able to make a living."

"Would you?" he asked, turning to that lady with earnest eyes. Clearly, she might be worth cultivating.

She laughed and left the room for a moment, returning with something in her hand wrapped in silver paper. "Do you like chocolate?" she inquired; adding, "I don't know how it would be if I kept it; but as I don't keep it, of course I give it away."

This had a puzzling sound. James Mandeville almost forgot to say thank you. He decided to go, feeling he could better enjoy the chocolate alone. He edged toward the door.

"Good-by," called Miss Norah. "Come again."

"All right," said James Mandeville, and disappeared from the scene.

After his departure all was quiet in the shop for a time, except for the occasional sound of Norah's hammer as she worked in the window. Marion was putting things away in the cases

which stood against the wall. It was she who first spoke.

"I wonder if we shall have any customers?"

"That is reflection upon my skill as a decorator. Do you think the public can resist the display which is about to dawn upon it on the morrow?" was Norah's reply.

Marion left her work and sat on the window ledge. Norah wore a blue dress and a large white apron, and as she stood to drive a tack, the sunshine sparkled in her hair. She looked the incarnation of cheerful industry.

"I do not know that I altogether believe in show windows," Marion said, smiling up at her friend.

"Of course not. It is all of a piece with your haughty reserve. Let me remind you that after we have made a success and have a name we can retire into our shell and become the sought rather than the seeker, but at present it is needful to catch the public eye. You have imbibed your ideas from the rich Miss Carpenter, but *we* have our living to make." She drove her tack with emphasis, then sat down on the floor of the window. "I am not sure I

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shall not always like this way best," she continued. "Think, if there were no show windows at Christmas! Marion, think of Christmas!"

"Isn't it a little early? There is a good deal to be done between now and then." Marion spoke calmly.

Norah tossed a ball of twine at her. "I see it will be by the hardest work if I get any fun out of life. But to resume my train of thought which you interrupted — "

"I beg your pardon, you interrupted yourself."

"Did I? Well, to resume, at any rate: my idea is that it will be much nicer to keep a shop which will attract both great and small, so to speak. To make a specialty always of nice, simple things."

"Flannelette?" suggested Marion.

"Why not? It is a useful fabric."

"I foresee if we enter into a discussion of this momentous question your window will not be finished, and I own to some curiosity as to how you mean to attract the great, for instance."

Marion returned to her baskets, and there was silence again for a time.

"Your idea of the bookcases was a happy

one," she said presently, standing back to view her work. "These baskets have the air of a collection of curios behind the glass."

"A charming touch of color against our olive walls. Confess, did you ever have such a good time in your life?"

"My enthusiasm is sprouting vigorously."

"And the fun is only just beginning. But do come here — quick, Marion! I want you to see Giant Despair."

A tall, heavily built old man was passing along Pleasant Street, his brows drawn together in a tremendous frown. He swung a stout walking-stick in his right hand, as if he would have been pleased to lay it over somebody's shoulders. At the corner he paused and looked back at the shop.

"Did you see? He shook his fist!" cried Norah.

"Have we an enemy?" asked Marion.

## CHAPTER SIXTH

### IN THE EYES OF THE NEIGHBORHOOD

ITS isolation in the heart of the city had something to do, no doubt, with certain village-like customs that prevailed in the Terrace. The neighbors ran in upon one another with their needlework for a social afternoon. If Alexina or Madelaine Russell were going to a party, there was sure to be an audience of two or three waiting to see them after they were dressed. When the Leigh's cook, Aunt Minty, made jumbles, a plateful always found its way over the back fence to Miss Virginia Wilbur; and when the Wilburs had something particularly nice for dessert, some neighbor had a share of it. Judge Russell and Mr. Goodman played chess together and talked of old times, and on the whole friendliness prevailed, with only an occasional neighborly tiff, when perhaps some one was heard to wish that Caroline Millard would mind her own business. There were other occasions when Mrs.

Millard's executive ability proved helpful and was warmly appreciated.

The strenuous life had not as yet invaded the Terrace. Mrs. Millard, to be sure, belonged to the Woman's Club, and presided at various board meetings, but she was the exception.

The Terrace had its problems. We know Miss Virginia's; but Alexina, not suspecting it, watching her in church on Sundays, wished she herself were middle-aged and had all her troublesome questions answered, for at forty-eight one must have solved life's problems, Alex thought.

Madelaine only wanted money to gratify her taste for pretty things. Given plenty of money, and life would be a simple matter. And so it seemed to Miss Sarah Leigh, always cheery, yet always burdened with the doubt where next month's bread and butter were to come from, and with the regret that her nephew, Wayland, must work instead of going to college.

Old Mr. Goodman had the money, and his great tomb of a house was full of valuable things, but his problem was hardest of all; for having to a sad degree lost his faith in men and things, he found no use for it. Judge Rus-

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sell sighed for the good old days ; but it was a gentle sigh, and soon forgotten in the companionship of his beloved books.

If from one point of view the neighborhood characteristic was sociability, its attitude toward the outsider was another matter. A new resident must undergo a term of probation before being in any sense accepted. Charlotte Creston, as the Wilburs' niece, was received and freely discussed. She was only a child, and for that reason something of a novelty in the Terrace, since the Russells and Wayland Leigh had grown up.

Toward the shop, which divided with Charlotte the distinction of latest comer, the feeling was decidedly antagonistic. It was as if that monster Business had suddenly reached out from his own domain, blocks away, and laid his hand upon their peaceful territory.

Something like a council of war took place in the Wilburs' drawing-room several evenings before the opening. Charlotte, supposed to be studying in the library, became an interested listener, shielded from view by the half-drawn hangings.

Alexina Russell was the first comer. Charlotte

had not yet made up her mind about Alex, she was so different at different times. She might have been almost as pretty as Madelaine, if she had fluffed her hair and dressed a little less plainly. Sometimes she was full of animation, again, as this evening, she appeared abstracted and silent.

After Miss Sarah Leigh and her aunt arrived there was no more silence; it had no charms for either of these ladies. Charlotte had at first felt something like contempt for a person so odd as Miss Sarah, who wore skirts short enough to display to advantage her serviceable shoes, and poked her head out when she walked. But if Miss Sarah had no pretensions to beauty or style, her face was pleasant, her eyes really fine, and her smile full of kindly humor. Charlotte learned from Aunt Virginia that Miss Sarah had an unusual number of distinguished ancestors, which went to show how little appearance can be relied on in such matters.

Mrs. Leigh suggested a bit of pretty old china of a pattern grown rare. Her eyes were bright, there was a hint of pink in her cheeks, and the silvery puffs beneath her lace cap had the

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exactness born of long years of training in the way they should go. When she walked, it was with a lightness wonderful in a woman of seventy-eight.

Before the Leigs were fairly seated one or two others dropped in, until it seemed quite like a called meeting of the neighborhood. Aunt Caroline was in the chair which, on this occasion, happened to be placed where the rosy glow from a shaded lamp fell becomingly on her soft gray draperies. Aunt Virginia fluttered about, constantly interrupting conversation with foot-stools or sofa cushions, or irrelevant remarks.

"Miss Virginia is always wondering if one more cushion or some other chair would not make you a little more comfortable," said Alex, as that lady appeared after her sixth excursion to the hall, this time with a light shawl for Mrs. Leigh's rheumatic shoulder.

"Do come and sit down, Virginia," laughed Miss Sarah; "you have no repose of manner."

"It is very fortunate that so many of us happen to be together this evening," began Mrs. Millard, "for I think we should decide upon our course in regard to the shop." Her white hand,

veiled in a fall of lace, made a slight motion in the direction of the corner.

"Don't you want some chocolate candy?" asked Miss Virginia, in an audible aside to Miss Sarah. "Charlotte and I made some this afternoon."

"When we have decided the fate of the shop," the lady whispered back.

"Seriously," continued Mrs. Millard, turning toward her sister with a slight frown, "should we not take some action?"

"You are right, Caroline. In my day shops kept to their own territory," Mrs. Leigh responded. "I remember the colonel used to say —but there! I promised Sarah I wouldn't tell any stories this evening. She says I bore people."

"Why, Aunt Sally! you are telling the biggest kind of a one this minute," cried her niece.

A good-natured warfare waged continually between these two. Mrs. Leigh, who was in reality the most petted and indulged of old ladies, pretending to live in constant fear of Miss Sarah.

"But what can we do?" Alexina was heard asking, as the skirmishers finally retired, Mrs.

Leigh having the last word. "We can't exactly blame these persons, whoever they may be, for coming here. They could not know we did not want them."

"I saw some one standing in the door of the shop this morning who *looked* like a lady," Miss Virginia remarked.

"How do you define a lady, Virginia?" her sister asked with some severity.

"Why, Caroline, I am not a dictionary; I wish you wouldn't ask me to define things," replied Miss Virginia, with a little laugh. Then with the manner of one who regretted this flippancy she added, "I think I understand the word as you do."

"It seems to me we are too often content with a surface meaning," Mrs. Millard continued.

"That is true," agreed Alex. "Now, there is no reason in the world why these shopkeepers may not be ladies."

Mrs. Millard looked at her doubtfully. "Still," she interposed, "ladies do not as a usual thing keep shops."

"No; they sweep and scrub and cook, and pretend they don't,—that is the difference," put

in Miss Sarah, crossing her knees and bending forward with the air of one who had found a congenial theme. "I am a paper-hanger, a painter, and a maid-of-all-work; and this is what it usually means to be a lady when you are poor."

"Teaching has always seemed to me a most suitable occupation for a woman," suggested Mrs. Millard.

"The day has passed, Caroline, when just anybody can teach."

"I don't know any girl who had a better education or was more studious than you, Sarah," spoke up her aunt.

"And when Brother Willie died I didn't know how to write a check or make the discount on a gas bill."

"I feel as you do, Miss Sarah. It is dreadful to be so ignorant as women are of the simplest things," exclaimed Alexina.

"Still, I think it is more comfortable not to have to know about them, don't you?" Miss Virginia asked timidly.

"What are you people talking about?" The question came from the doorway, where Madelaine stood, a vision of such airiness, daintiness, and

ethereal charm that nothing else seemed worth a thought. Behind her towered Wayland Leigh.

"May we join the party and help decide the burning question?" he asked. "Don't get up, Miss Virginia; we'll find chairs."

"I know it is the shop," said Madelaine, floating across the room to an ottoman beside Mrs. Millard. Madelaine, too, had an instinct for the effective, and nothing could have made a more charming picture. "Grandpa and Mr. Goodman were at it a few minutes ago. Mr. Goodman talks about an injunction."

"We began with the shop, but we seem to have switched off on to education," said Mrs. Leigh. "One never heard such talk when I was young. Then we had plenty of servants, and there was always some man to attend to business. After the war I asked our old Malinda one day how she liked freedom. 'Well, Miss Sally,' she said, 'I likes it, and I don't like it. I tell you what, Miss Sally, freedom's monstrous industrious.' That is what I think about these times,—'they's monstrous industrious.' Goodness, I have gone and told a story!"

"I shall have to take you home before you transgress again," said her niece, rising.

"Don't go. We haven't decided what we must do," urged Miss Virginia.

"What do you think, Mrs. Millard?" asked Madelaine, with an upward glance, and flattering emphasis.

Mrs. Millard caressed the hand that lay on her lap as she replied, "My own feeling is that we should refuse our patronage—not that they are likely to have anything we'd care to buy—and use our influence against it."

"Well, I for one shan't make any promises; if I need a spool of thread and can save a walk, I shall go over there to get it," Miss Sarah announced positively.

"You might add that your patronage is not likely of itself to save the shop from bankruptcy," put in her nephew.

Everybody seemed to be going. Charlotte tucked her history under her arm and ran upstairs. As she went to the window to draw the curtain a bright light shone from the shop across the street.

"I wonder if you'll be sorry you came here?" said Charlotte to herself.

## CHAPTER SEVENTH

### A SPOOL OF TWIST

THE shop windows on the opening day proved most alluring to Miss Virginia. There were two,—one overlooking the square of lawn on the Terrace, the other, Pleasant Street. Between them, placed across the corner, was the door.

The Terrace window was full of plants, while on the Pleasant Street side there was a tempting display of color. Miss Virginia hunted up her distance glasses, which she seldom used, in order the better to view it; but she failed to make out anything in particular. Her ardor might have suggested an archæologist over a cuneiform inscription, as she tried to decide whether a certain patch of blue and white was a pillow or a table-cover.

Charlotte openly stopped to view the window on her way home from school, and Miss Virginia, observing it, privately questioned her.



SECURELY INTRENCHED BEHIND THE LACE CURTAIN.  
SHE LEVELLED HER GLASS.



"You ought to go over and look in, Aunt Virginia," she said. "There are the prettiest baskets you ever saw."

Miss Virginia adored baskets.

"And there is the dearest sofa pillow."

She had decided on a pillow for Caroline's birthday.

"And, Aunt Virginia, there are the cunningest little collars with cuffs to match," Charlotte continued with mischievous eyes.

Miss Virginia grew impatient. It was out of all reason that such desirable things should be brought almost to her door and yet be beyond her reach.

"It wouldn't be giving them much encouragement just to look in the window," observed Charlotte. "I'll tell you," she cried the next minute, "opera glasses!"

"*My dear*, look at my neighbors through an opera glass?"

"But they *want* to be looked at," insisted Charlotte, with unanswerable logic.

Miss Virginia allowed herself to be persuaded, and, securely entrenched behind the lace curtain, she levelled her glass. As is ever the case with

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one who dallies with temptation, the result was an increased desire to have that pillow in her hands.

Standing absorbed in contemplation, she suddenly, without intending it, turned her gaze upon one of the upper windows; and as she did so the muslin draperies parted and a pair of merry eyes belonging to a pretty face looked straight into hers.

"I beg your pardon," cried Miss Virginia, dropping her glass and sinking into a chair. "I shall be ashamed of this to my dying day," she groaned, while Charlotte went off into fits of laughter.

It was some time before she could be brought to realize she had not been seen. "Not that that makes it much better," she added contritely. "And, Charlotte, don't mention it to your Aunt Caroline. I think my ideas of propriety are as strict as hers, but I do not succeed so well in living up to them. I fear I am, as she says, childish."

"I shall not say anything about it, and I am sure I think you are very nice, Aunt Virginia," answered Charlotte, still laughing.

The suspicion that Charlotte liked her better than she did Caroline was a secret pleasure to Miss Virginia, and she flushed prettily as she said, "Thank you, dear; I am far from what I should be."

Charlotte went to take her music lesson; Mrs. Millard was attending a club meeting; the house was very quiet as Miss Virginia sat down to her embroidery. While she worked, the face so vividly imprinted on her memory in that moment's view continued to rise before her. She began to feel something like sympathy for its owner. She had not supposed it would be such an attractive shop. What possible harm could there be in going over just to look? She might even go in and explain to the proprietor that she had made a mistake in coming into the neighborhood. It would be a kindness. She could use a spool of buttonhole twist as an excuse. She really needed it.

Then she saw the foolishness of all this and tried to think of something else. She worked another scallop, and concluded to go for a walk.

When she stepped out of the gate, she turned her back upon the shop and walked in the

opposite direction, but a quarter of an hour later she might have been seen approaching it by way of Pleasant Street.

It was a beautiful October day; there was a suggestion of autumn in the maples, but the air was soft as spring. As she stood before the door her heart beat guiltily; her own home across the way wore an oddly unfamiliar look.

Being a shop one was, of course, expected to open the door and walk in. Miss Virginia did so, and for a bewildered moment felt she had made a mistake, for there was nothing in the room she entered that seemed to bear any relation to a shop.

In the window, where the ferns and palms were, three persons sat, two young women and a small boy in socks. One of the three rose and came to meet her. The identity of the face with the one she had seen through the opera glass so recently, added to her confusion.

"Can I show you something?"

Miss Virginia gazed at the speaker despairingly. "I have forgotten what I came for," she stammered.

It might have been an everyday occurrence to

have customers who had forgotten what they wanted, for anything the manner of the young woman showed. She smiled indeed, but sympathetically, saying she often forgot things herself; and, pushing forward a willow chair, added, "Won't you sit down and let me show you some of our things?"

Not seeing her way clear to escape, Miss Virginia accepted the chair. There were other chairs of the same variety, some of them supplied with cushions; around the olive-tinted walls were low cases which might hold books or anything; there was a table with a lamp and magazines upon it, and in the corner fireplace a low fire flickered. The most businesslike piece of furniture was the long table upon which the young woman was laying out a bewitching assortment of collars and cuffs of a daintiness that went to the heart. Miss Virginia forgot her embarrassment in her pleasure at the array of pretty things.

The small boy crossed the room, and depositing a gray flannel donkey on the table leaned upon Miss Virginia's chair. He was a pretty child, and she smiled at him as he lifted his serious brown eyes.

"Jack likes to see what you are doing, but you mustn't sell him by mistake, Miss Norah," he said.

"Is this your little boy?" she asked.

"No, James Mandeville is a neighbor and very good friend of ours. Aren't you, Infinitesimal James?"

He nodded emphatically, and continued to look on with interest while Norah hung soft-tinted fabrics over a convenient rack, and brought out baskets of all colors and shapes.

It was clearly James Mandeville's fault that Miss Wilbur was unable to preserve that distant manner which was the only proper attitude toward this objectionable shop. When he laid his plump hand on hers and looked up at her in silent good fellowship, she felt a thrill of pleasure. Could any one refuse a child's offer of friendship? Not Miss Virginia, certainly. She bent and touched his cheek with her lips. James Mandeville, moved to further demonstration, brought the donkey and laid him on her lap.

"Don't show me anything more," she said, patting the donkey. "Everything is beautiful. I

really didn't come expecting to buy, but I must have one of these collars." She laid a bit of embroidery against her sleeve and looked down at it thoughtfully.

The sunlight fell slantingly across the room, gleaming in James Mandeville's short curls and emphasizing all the cosiness and pleasantness of her surroundings. The spirit of friendliness grew strong in Miss Virginia. She felt in no haste to leave.

While Norah searched for something in one of the cases, Miss Wilbur peeped around the chair back at the occupant of the window who was employing herself with knitting. She was not—so Miss Virginia thought—as attractive as her associate, although she could not be called ordinary. Meanwhile James Mandeville investigated her shopping bag with absorbed interest.

The opening of the shop door interrupted her thoughts, and before she had time to push aside the draperies which, disposed upon the rack, intervened between her and the door, she heard a cool, clear voice announce, "I wish a spool of twist—black if you please."

Miss Virginia gazed wildly toward the door at

the other end of the room, her first impression being that Caroline had come in search of her. The next moment she realized with surprise and amusement that her sister had come altogether on her own account and had asked for the very same thing she herself had thought of purchasing. Miss Virginia braced herself for the inevitable encounter, and when Miss Norah returned, thanked her for her kindness in showing so many of her wares, and selected one from the collars before her. The while she heard her sister's voice.

"Do you consider this a good locality for a shop?" Mrs. Millard asked. "It seems to me quite otherwise, and I think it the only proper course to tell you that the neighborhood strongly objects to such an intrusion."

Miss Virginia felt her face grow hot.

"Isn't it a little late to tell us this?" The tall young woman who had put down her knitting to serve the newcomer seemed not a whit abashed at Mrs. Millard's manner. If anything, she was the more queenly of the two, and might have been bestowing a favor as she handed back the change.

Norah's sunny face intervened. "We are very sorry if you don't want us," she said, "for we shall have to stay for the present. We think we are quite as nice as a drug store, and perhaps we shall be able to convince you of it before long."

Could Caroline hold out against such winning address? What she might have said or done was never known, for James Mandeville, desiring to see what was going on, and attempting to crawl under the rack with its burden of fabrics, precipitated it upon himself and was lost in the ruins, while Miss Virginia was revealed in all her ignominy, with a flannel donkey in her lap, to the eyes of her relative.

"Virginia! I am astonished!"

Miss Wilbur rose to the occasion. "So am I, Caroline. I, too, came to get a spool of twist." There is good authority for the assertion that one may smile and be a villain, but hitherto such depths of perfidy had been unsuspected in Miss Virginia.

The united efforts of the shopkeepers were required to disentangle James Mandeville and quiet his cries of alarm. In the struggle Miss

Wilbur's bag suffered a complete upturn, and her small change was scattered to the four corners of the room.

Mrs. Millard stood apart looking on in disdain at the confusion, when again the shop door opened, this time to admit Miss Sarah Leigh who advanced and addressed her, fumbling in her pocket-book meanwhile and not lifting her eyes. "I want a spool of twist," she said, producing a sample of blue silk. "Why, Caroline Wilbur!" and she stared in amazement.

Norah who had set James Mandeville, still weeping, out of harm's way on the table, met Miss Sarah's bewildered gaze with a frank smile, as if she appreciated the joke.

"Do you call this a shop?" Miss Sarah demanded; adding, "Well, if there isn't Virginia! Are Judge Russell and Mr. Goodman hiding somewhere? Is this a conspiracy?"

"I'll explain later," said Mrs. Millard, with dignity. "Virginia, are you ready?"

As they crossed Pleasant Street together, Miss Sarah was disposed to make merry at Mrs. Millard's expense, but that lady's haughtiness was extreme. There was nothing funny in her actions.

She had gone to the shop with a purpose, thinking it only the part of fairness to tell them frankly they were not wanted in the neighborhood.

"That is what I thought of doing," said Miss Virginia. But who can blame her sister for looking incredulous.

"Well, I'm going again," said Miss Sarah, pausing at the gate. "It is an interesting place."

Miss Virginia agreed with her, and yet she was beginning to feel a little doubtful about her own behavior this afternoon. She feared she had not been quite dignified.

"Sarah Leigh was never a person of very strong convictions," her sister remarked, as they waited at the door.

"Why, I don't know, Caroline,—perhaps they are just different."

"Really, I don't understand you, Virginia," was Mrs. Millard's response, nor did she manifest any desire for enlightenment.

Miss Virginia felt that her conduct that afternoon was embraced in her sister's remark, and that it would be quite hopeless to try to explain.

## CHAPTER EIGHTH

### A MATTER OF LOYALTY

MRS. MILLARD'S irritation was not long in bearing fruit. On the hall table lay a card, and pausing on her way upstairs she examined it through her jewelled lorgnette. Charlotte, halfway down, leaned over the rail and watched her, admiring the sweep of her gown, the perfection of the gloved hand that held the card.

One might object to Aunt Caroline's methods and rebel against her mandates, and yet not be blind to the exquisite perfection of her appearance and belongings. Charlotte had privately borrowed one of Aunt Virginia's skirts, and practised before the cheval glass, but the flowing lines that so much pleased her she found unattainable.

"Miss Lucile Lyle," Mrs. Millard read aloud.

"It is for me, Aunt Caroline," said Charlotte, from above. "I have been walking with Miss Alex and missed her."

"Which is rather fortunate than otherwise; for," Mrs. Millard tapped the card with her glass, "I desire you not to make a friend of this young lady."

Charlotte sat down on the step. "Does that mean I am to be rude to her?"

"Certainly not. There are ways of letting people know you do not care for their society without being rude."

"I don't see how you can do it without being unpleasant," argued Charlotte; "and I like Lucile."

"That last fact has nothing to do with it. It is important at your age to form proper friendships. This I do not consider desirable, and I expect you to be guided by me."

"What am I to do?" Charlotte persisted.

"I see no occasion to do anything."

"She will think it rude if I do not go to see her."

"What she thinks is of little moment. You can say your aunt does not care to have you make visits while you are occupied with your studies."

"But she knows I have been to see the Mays."

"Well, really, Charlotte, I cannot argue the question further. I simply expect to be obeyed in the matter." With this final utterance Mrs. Millard swept past her.

Charlotte had come in from her walk in good spirits. She felt it an honor to be chosen as a companion by a grown young lady, and Miss Alex had been very entertaining as they walked about the park under the beech trees. In these days Charlotte's ideals were in an unstable state. On the one hand, she admired Lucile, longed to be Carlotta and the heroine of romantic adventures. On the other, she recognized a certain distinction in Alexina's severe style, and felt proud of her notice.

This afternoon Alex's influence had been in the ascendant. She had shown a flattering interest in all Charlotte told about her life at Aunt Cora's and the Landors'. She had read some of Cousin Frank's stories and poems and admired them, making Charlotte proud of being even distantly related to him.

"It must be splendid to do things," Alex said. "To feel that you have your own special work to do in the world."

"I should love to write stories or paint pictures," agreed Charlotte.

"Any sort of useful work,—work there was a demand for, and that I could do better, or at least as well as any one else, would satisfy me," said Alex.

Alexina had gone on to give Charlotte a great deal of good advice about making the most of her opportunities. She listened gravely to the story of the borrowed novel Aunt Caroline had taken away; and while she acknowledged it was trying, she pointed out that it was a foolish story, and not worth reading.

When Charlotte went on to describe Lucile, Alex did not seem impressed, only saying, "I wonder who the Lyles are; I never heard of them. Of course they may be nice people, but Lucile Lyle is such a silly name."

"I think it is beautiful," cried Charlotte, wondering what Miss Alex would think of Carlotta Creston.

"No," the young lady said, as if replying to her thought, "I prefer plain names. For instance, if you should turn out to be a brilliant beauty and all that, there is nothing inappro-

priate in your name, Charlotte Creston. You can glorify it; but if you are only an ordinary person, you are made absurd by a name you cannot live up to."

This was a new view to take of it. Charlotte wavered, and really Lucile's influence was a little on the wane when the encounter with Aunt Caroline gave it new life. At school next day Charlotte came again under her spell.

Lucile was undeniably pretty and almost as grown up in appearance as Miss Alex, though only fifteen. She was intensely romantic, her own personal experiences at this early age would have supplied several novels, and her manner toward Charlotte was caressing and flattering. Charlotte was one of the few who understood her, she said. They were kindred souls.

Lucile wrote verses which seemed to Charlotte quite as good as Cousin Frank's, and she could sing any number of love-songs charmingly. The girls would gather about the piano at recess and beg her to sing. The favorite was one beginning:—

“Teach, oh, teach me not to love thee !  
Turn those beauteous eyes away,”

and Lucile always bent a soulful gaze upon Charlotte when she sang it. Charlotte wondered if her eyes were beauteous.

"When are you coming to see me Carlotta?"  
Lucile asked one day.

They were walking home from school, and had paused on the corner where their ways divided.

"I don't know. They don't like me to go out alone," was the answer, given with a flushed face.

"But the cars bring you almost to our door.  
I shall be terribly hurt."

Charlotte looked gloomy. "I can't come if they won't let me. You don't know. They think I am six years old."

"You don't love me. I see it plainly." With a tragic gesture Lucile drew a ring from her finger and held it out. "Take it back," she said:

In the first ardor of their friendship they had exchanged rings, Charlotte feeling a little mortified at the time that Lucile's was so much handsomer than hers, and she had kept it carefully turned in to avoid comment. But after all it was not giving up the ring she minded. Lucile's apparent distress touched her affectionate heart.

"Don't say that!" she entreated, drawing back.

"I do love you, and I will come to see you whether they let me or not." In the glow of her devotion she felt like a heroine in one of Lucile's favorite tales. It was a question of loyalty now. She had promised to be friends before Aunt Caroline issued her commands. So they parted with renewed vows, and Charlotte's assurance that she would come that very afternoon on her way from her music lesson, if she could escape unobserved.

Charlotte had very imperfectly learned the lesson of obedience to higher powers, and it was not difficult to convince herself that she was justified. It did seem a little underhand, this was all that troubled her.

Aunt Virginia, who was going down town in the carriage, offered to take her to her lesson; adding, "You can find your way back, I suppose."

"I should think so, after so many times," Charlotte answered, feeling guilty.

Aunt Virginia was particularly agreeable and funny that afternoon. Charlotte was really becoming very fond of her. She was a merry companion; she liked foolish things, such as soda-water and candy, and was even willing to stop and watch a circus parade.

"If it is cool when you leave, be sure to put your jacket on," was her parting injunction.

"And if it rains, I'll put up my umbrella," Charlotte called after her, saucily. At the same time she felt ashamed of what she had planned to do. If it had not been for the memory of Lucile's reproaches, she would have given it up.

It must have been the thought of Aunt Virginia that kept the call from being the pleasure she had expected. Lucile was very glad to see her, and took her over the large, showy house, which seemed exactly suited to the large blond woman with a complexion of pinkish lavender, whom she introduced as her mother. Mrs. Lyle wore a costume of black and white, in broad stripes, and a wonderful, black plumed hat, which brought to mind Aunt Cora's poster room.

She was most gracious, complimenting Charlotte's eyes, and asking if she did not find the Terrace dreadfully far down town. She also asked about the Russells; said Alexina was odd and Madelaine a beauty, and that it was a great pity the judge had not known how to keep his money,— all of which seemed strange to Charlotte, when she remembered Alex's question, "Who are the Lyles?"

Lucile seemed proud of the house and told the cost of a good many things. She wanted to know why Charlotte's aunts did not sell their house in the Terrace and build out on the Avenue.

"I don't believe they want to," Charlotte answered; "and I think the Terrace is very nice," she added, feeling Lucile was rather too complacent.

"Why, they are beginning to put up stores there!" Lucile exclaimed.

Charlotte had herself freely criticised the Terrace, but this did not keep her from resenting Lucile's remarks, and she carried away with her a consciousness of the friction. As she walked home, she felt a vague dissatisfaction with life in general, and heartily wished she had not gone. She could not help seeing, just a little, why Aunt Caroline did not care for the Lyles.

Charlotte had a strong impulse to confess, and say she was sorry for what she had done; but the right moment did not come. Aunt Caroline was out that evening and Aunt Virginia in one of her shy, elusive moods. She got as far as "Aunt Virginia, I want to tell you,—I did

something dreadful to-day — ” when a visitor was announced. Her aunt looked relieved.

“ Never mind, my dear; if you are sorry, I have no doubt it will be all right,” she said, rising hastily. “ Go to bed early.”

How could you tell people things if they did not want to listen? At any rate she would not go to the Lyles’ again, and she gave herself to her studies with a new earnestness born of repentance.

## CHAPTER NINTH

### IN THE SHOP

THE opposition of the neighborhood resulted in advertising the shop to some extent. Whoever saw the odd little place was certain to tell some one else; and this person and that, dropping in out of curiosity to look, remained to buy, if only a trifle.

The wares were novel and attractive, the prices reasonable, and the shopkeepers themselves afforded food for speculation. Like their wares, they were unusual,—considered as shopkeepers, that is. To all appearances ladies, their manner of speech betrayed they were not Southern; yet they did not single out the letter *r* as worthy of peculiar emphasis,—a thing the Terrace could not tolerate.

To those who often passed the shop, James Mandeville became a familiar figure; for from the first he elected to bestow upon its proprietors his unqualified friendship, and a day rarely

went by without a visit from him. He quickly learned to adapt himself to the rule that he must not finger things, nor interrupt when customers were present. He usually brought some plaything with him,—most frequently the flannel donkey,—and amused himself quite happily, with an occasional appeal to the sympathy of his companions.

His new friends began to look forward each day to his coming and to the invariable piece of news with which he entered.

"Miss Norah, what do you think?" he exclaimed one morning. "The moon's awake and it's daytime!" and drawing her to the door he pointed out the misty phantom in the southwestern sky, with the air of a discoverer.

On another occasion, "Miss Norah, I can't stay very long to-day, 'cause my geranium is going to bloom."

It developed that James Mandeville's mother was ill in a sanitarium, his father absorbed in business, and his only guardian an old colored woman, known as Mammy Belle. Mammy Belle was of the type fast disappearing. She wore head handkerchiefs of bright colors, and her

purple calicoes were stiff with starch and spotlessly neat. She possessed the peculiar dignity that accompanied a faithful, unquestioning acceptance of her station in life.

Mammy had sole charge of the Norton household, and no doubt it was a relief to her to know that her charge had found so safe an asylum; but on the occasion of her first visit the shopkeepers felt they were being weighed in the balance. Her manner was apologetic and reserved, as she stood, her hands folded on her white apron.

"'Tain't possible to keep dat chile at home," she explained. "Yes'm, I takes keer of him. Miss Maimie, she's in a hospital, an' dey ain't nobody to raise James Mandeville but his old mammy."

"I ain't comin', mammy," declared her charge, positively.

"Yes, you is comin', honey; don' you talk to mammy dat way. 'Tisn't pretty. Looks like it's mighty hard to raise you polite, James Mandeville."

Norah delighted to talk with her, and gathered from her conversation that her greatest pleasure, next to a funeral, was to take James Mandeville

to white folks' church on Sunday afternoon, "to see dem chillen march and sing." To her enthusiasm was due the aspiration of her charge to be a choir boy, and he was often heard singing lustily versions of "Onward, Christian Soldiers," and "O Paradise," which were all his own.

"Dey's ladies, store or no store," Belle was overheard remarking to Susanna. "I knows quality; you can't fool Belle, no'm."

"I never in my life felt so rich," Marion said, rattling the money drawer.

It was Saturday evening at the end of their first week. All was in order in the shop, the long table pushed back, the small one with the lamp brought forward, the shades drawn, the door barred, and Norah now rested comfortably in one of the roomy chairs with a gay pillow behind her head.

"We have done very well, I think," she agreed.

"I perceive this is one subject upon which my enthusiasm is greater than yours. It must be because you have made money before." Marion still hung over the money drawer.

"I don't consider that we have made anything yet; but the difference between us is that I expected all along to do very well, while you were a doubting Thomas."

"As I always am." With surprising ease for one so tall, Marion slipped down on the rug at her friend's feet.

Norah caressed the dark head against her knee. "But you are improving, dearest," she said, "and I'm glad, indeed, if this first week has encouraged you." She laughed a little as she added, "I believe I am just a bit more anxious to prove to our friend Miss Carpenter that in lending us the capital for our venture she has not done a reckless and unwise thing."

"But, Norah —"

"I know what you are going to say. She is not worrying about the money and could well afford to take the risk, but with you and me it is a matter of principle. We must succeed and justify her confidence. So we won't count our chickens too soon, but lay low, like Brer Rabbit, and say nothin'."

"At any rate I know what it is to have worked all the week, and to be tired and glad of

Sunday. Norah, it is nonsense expecting people really to care for Sunday when they don't work."

"I hope you haven't tired yourself too much;" Norah bent forward till she could see the face on her knee. Her manner was oddly motherly; she seemed so much the younger and smaller of the two.

"Oh, no; and sometimes I have almost forgotten—"

"Go on forgetting, dear. I know you need not fear, if you will only think so."

"If I were only sure," Marion sighed. "And sometimes I am," she added.

"At least I am charmed with the neighborhood," Norah went on. "If the haughty lady across the street continues her opposition, our success is assured. Her name, I have discovered, is Millard, and that dear Miss Virginia is her sister, of course; and there is a bright-looking little girl who goes in and out, and seems to belong to them.

"And I forgot to tell you my adventure this morning. When I got off the car at Walnut Street, coming home, there was an old gentleman with some books just behind me. He had an

armful, and as he stepped to the ground they slipped and fell in the dust. He was evidently lame and stiff with rheumatism, so I picked them up for him. He was a beautiful old man, with a most courtly manner; and he seemed to think as I had helped him, I was entitled to know about the books. We walked along together, and he explained they were some he had found at a second-hand store. One of them was a first edition of the 'Essays of Elia' which he thought a tremendous bargain; and it was, I'm sure.

"We fell to discussing books, and he seemed delighted to find I was not absolutely ignorant and ended by inviting me in to see his library. He lives in the house that needs paint so badly,—where you have noticed that beautiful Ginkgo tree."

"Did you accept his invitation?"

"No, I told him I had not time just then. He asked if I lived near; and, Marion, you should have seen his puzzled look when I said, 'On the corner of Pleasant Street.' 'You are visiting?—the Wilburs, perhaps.' he said. 'No,' I answered, 'I am one of the proprietors of the shop.' He was terribly shocked and disappointed, I could

see. I had really made an impression. He grew a little distant, but was still charming, thanking me again for my kindness; however, he said no more about the library."

"It is funny—" began Marion, but she did not finish her sentence, and they sat in silence for a while. Presently Marion took possession of the hand that was touching her hair so lightly, and laid her cheek against it. Not many people, she thought, had such a friend. One who had been everything in a time of need, who had given her new hope and courage in an hour of darkness. She felt herself unworthy, because she did not believe she could ever be such a help to any one.

"Do you remember, when you were a child, Norah, how sometimes when you had found some delightful game that stirred your imagination, you would go to sleep at night with the most blissful sense of waking up to go on with it in the morning? I have had much the same feeling lately."

"Then I am satisfied about you. 'As little children' is the key to the best things of life, I firmly believe. Let's read a bit of 'The Golden Age' before we go to bed," said Norah.

## CHAPTER TENTH

### ALEXINA

**A**LEXINA RUSSELL longed to be of use in the world. It fretted her to live as they did, pensioners on her grandfather, whose fortune had sadly dwindled of late years. Her mother's income was barely sufficient to clothe the three of them, and Alex felt she ought to be earning her own living. That her grandfather made them more than welcome, and besides had an old-fashioned horror of a woman going out into the world as a worker, did not alter her conviction.

She did not feel competent to teach. Delicate as a child, she had gone to school intermittently, and the best of her somewhat scrappy education had been gained in her grandfather's library; but she found it difficult to combat the prejudice of the whole family against any other method of supporting herself. Alex loved the old house,—the outside of which time and coal-dust had turned a uniform dingy gray,—and sometimes wondered

how she could ever stand it to live anywhere else. There is a point where dinginess becomes picturesque; and the vines, undisturbed by repairs, were doing their best to hide all deficiencies. The grounds were ample for a city; and the tall Ginkgo tree which reached out its fern-like branches protectingly toward the timeworn mansion was only one of many other fine trees and shrubs. Inside, the lofty rooms and handsome furnishings of many years ago, some fine old portraits, and many valuable books and prints gave it a distinction not to be achieved by many modern houses.

Pretty Mrs. Russell, almost as dainty and girlish as her youngest daughter, shed tears over Alex's oddity; and Alex, who sincerely loved and admired her mother, felt her burden all the greater because she was a disappointment. She had submitted for one winter to be taken to receptions and teas, and to have a dinner given in her honor, in the newspaper accounts of which the rare old Russell silver figured effectively, and on the whole she had enjoyed it. But a season of it was enough; her practical mind rebelled against the expense and uselessness of such a life. She

adopted the plainest style of dress, declined invitations, and privately studied shorthand.

In the bottom of her heart Madelaine thought it just as well. Plain things became Alex, and it was nobody's fault but her own if she preferred the background. And Alex was not in the least jealous of her sister's popularity. She had something of the responsible feelings of a father or brother toward her mother and Madelaine.

Alex's refuge was the library and the companionship of her grandfather, who often told her she took life too seriously.

"You are young yet. Be happy, and things will work out of themselves."

But Alexina did not share his gentle optimism. It seemed to her at once the charm and weakness of her grandfather's character. She was impatient; she wanted to know what was the right path for her to take, not to waste years in finding it.

Mrs. Russell sometimes laughingly declared that Alex's most intimate friends were Miss Virginia Wilbur and Miss Sarah Leigh, and it was true she often sought their society. Miss Wilbur had made pets of the Russell children

from their babyhood, and they were both fond of her. There were times when Alex found her placid absorption in everyday matters rather soothing, at others Miss Sarah suited her mood better.

Miss Sarah had all manner of troubles and worries, but she did not box them up and label them "Personal"; instead, she offered them to her friends dressed up in whimsical fashion for their entertainment, until it was difficult to consider them seriously. Old Mrs. Leigh was heard to say she did not know what Sarah would find to laugh about if she ever became prosperous.

Alexina found shorthand depressing, and after spending an hour or more over it one afternoon she gave it up in despair and went over to see Miss Sarah. As she entered the sitting room Mrs. Millard stood talking to Mrs. Leigh.

"I suppose the next thing we'll be going to the Poor House," the old lady was remarking cheerfully, for she was not far behind her niece in the ability to extract pleasure from adversity. "Sarah says the Cement Company has passed their dividend again. I know that means we don't get any money."

"Dear me!" exclaimed Mrs. Millard; "why, Sarah, what are you living on?"

The person addressed looked up from her sewing with a grim smile. "I don't know—Caroline. We—are just living—*on*."

"I don't see how you can *smile*," said Mrs. Millard, with reproachful emphasis. She was never guilty of making light of affliction.

"Well, there are funny things about being poor, Caroline; but I suppose it takes a poor person to appreciate them." Then observing Alex in the door, Miss Sarah added, "Come in and cheer us up, Alex."

"I am ashamed to say I came to be cheered," Alex said, after Mrs. Millard had rustled away.

"Well, misery loves company, so just come to the kitchen with me while I stir up a spice cake for Wayland, and we'll swap woes and have a good time. I let Anne go to see her sister this afternoon."

When the materials had been collected and Alex assigned her share of the task, Miss Sarah continued: "I have two things to tell you. First, I have made up my mind to take boarders. I was trembling in my shoes all the while

---

Caroline was here, for fear Aunt Sally would tell her. She will think it a disgrace to the neighborhood; I'll be ranked with the shop, but I must do something. We can't sell the house, and it would break Aunt Sally's heart if we could, for it is all she has."

"I don't think it will hurt the neighborhood, and I hope you will succeed. I'm sure I should love to board with you."

"Would you really, Alex? Doesn't the house strike you as very forlorn? I'll tell you what I am going to do," and Miss Sarah launched forth into an account of how she meant to cut the hall carpet in two and turn it around so the worn part would come under the stairs. "But dear me!" she interrupted herself to say, "how absurd to bother you with all this. It is your turn to say something."

"I like to hear it. I am interested, and my worries are the same old ones. I do want to learn how to do something to support myself, and stenography is so—abominably dull. I am angry with myself for finding it so." Alex rested her chin in her hand, and looked at Miss Sarah disconsolately across the table.

"I do not believe you were meant for that sort of thing," Miss Sarah said stoutly. "Of course I can't tell you what you *were* made for; but I know what I'd like to do, and that is, keep a shop such as the one on the corner."

"What would Mrs. Millard say to that?" Alex asked, laughing.

"She can't say much since she was caught there herself. You needn't tell me curiosity had not something to do with it. But I am forgetting the other thing I had to tell you. I have made trouble in the Wilbur household."

"What do you mean? How?"

"I was never more provoked with myself. The other day I happened to be out on Dean Avenue, and whom should I see going into the Lyles' but Charlotte Creston. You know that big, showy house near the park. What possessed me to mention it, I don't know, but I did, one evening when Caroline and Virginia were here. I knew in a minute something was wrong. I have an idea Charlotte went without permission."

"Who are the Lyles?" asked Alex.

"Mrs. Lyle was at the glove counter at Mason's years ago; she was then Maggie McKay, and a

vain, pretentious thing. She married a plumber with a romantic name, and her rise has been rapid. Now, if you and I could only be plumbers!"

"I remember Charlotte mentioned a Lucile Lyle, and seemed rather fascinated, but I did not think she would be so silly as to go there against her aunt's wishes. I am afraid she is headstrong."

"She is the sort of a child to be goaded to distraction by Caroline. I wish I had held my tongue. I can see Virginia is dreadfully upset about something."

"I think I'll go over and talk to Charlotte," Alex said, as Miss Sarah shut the oven door on the spice cake. Alexina had had dreams of influencing Charlotte, and she felt a little annoyed that what she had said on the subject of this foolish friendship had made such a slight impression.

"Now don't you go and make matters worse, Alex," cautioned Miss Sarah. "I have no doubt Caroline has harped on the matter till the child is desperate. I feel terribly guilty."

"I am disappointed in her, and I mean to tell her so," Alex replied firmly.

## CHAPTER ELEVENTH

### THE LAST STRAW

CHARLOTTE was closing the piano after an hour's practice when Alexina walked in. A week had passed since the discovery of her disobedience,—a week of increasing unhappiness. The blow had fallen unexpectedly. One day at dinner she had been conscious of something amiss. A remark of her own met with no response; Aunt Caroline looked haughty, Aunt Virginia despondent. Charlotte had not, however, guessed the cause until she was summoned into the library and the question put to her by Mrs. Millard, "Did you go to the Lyles' in defiance of my express wishes, Charlotte?"

"I—"

"Yes or no, if you please."

"Yes," Charlotte answered, "but—"

"I want no explanations. There can be none."

"But, Aunt Caroline, you don't understand—"

"You are the one who seems not to understand," again Mrs. Millard interrupted. "You have deliberately disobeyed. I see you are not to be trusted. Hereafter, whenever you go out, you shall be provided with an attendant. The carriage will take you to and from school, your Aunt Virginia or I will accompany you to your music lesson when possible; at other times Martha will go."

"Aunt Caroline, you might let me speak. I tried to tell Aunt Virginia—I had promised Lucile—I had to go; but I am dreadfully sorry, and—"

"Charlotte, I will not have any words on the subject. You have deliberately disobeyed. Nothing you can say alters that." Mrs. Millard swept from the room, almost running down Miss Virginia, who hovered about the door.

"She did try to tell, Caroline," Charlotte heard her say.

"Nonsense, what difference can that make?" was the reply.

Not to be allowed one word in self-defence was hard. Charlotte locked herself in her room

and shed bitter tears of anger and mortification. That she was sorry and had tried to confess seemed to her to be very much to her credit, and Aunt Caroline was unreasonable as well as cruel. She refused to go down to supper, saying her head ached; and it would have been in harmony with her state of mind if she had been compelled to go without any, but it was sent up to her without comment.

The worst was to come, however. To a high-spirited girl, used to the greatest freedom, the constant surveillance was unbearable. She was not locked up, but in all other respects she felt herself a captive.

She was certain Aunt Virginia was sorry for her,—in an aloof and timid fashion she showed her friendliness; but Charlotte longed for some one to whom she could pour out all her unhappiness, and for this Aunt Virginia allowed her no opportunity.

How long was it to last? Aunt Caroline gave no word. As the days passed, Charlotte began to wear a sullen, dogged look. The sight of Alexina brought a thrill of hope. Surely, Miss Alex would listen to her, and be sorry.

"Charlotte, what is this I hear about you?" Alexina demanded, seating herself on the piano-stool.

"Oh, Miss Alex, I am so unhappy." Charlotte, who was kneeling to put away some music in the cabinet, sank in a forlorn little heap at her feet. "She won't let me go anywhere by myself,—not even to school; and she wouldn't listen when I said I was sorry." Charlotte's tone was guarded, but none the less appealing.

But Alex hardened her heart. "I suppose it is because you were disobedient. I must say I am disappointed in you, for it seems to me you were deceitful as well as disobedient."

Charlotte sat up. Her last hope of a confidante was gone. "You have no right to say that. I had to go: I had promised. I was willing to be punished, but she has no right to treat me like a baby. I wish I had never come."

"Probably your aunts wish so too," Alex observed coolly. "You are not reasonable, Charlotte. You have acted like a silly child and made yourself talked about, and you are just worrying Miss Virginia to death. But don't

look at me in that way. I am sorry for you, and if you will be patient and accept your punishment, it will come out all right." Alex laid her hand on Charlotte's shoulder, but the girl twitched it away. Rising, she stood stony and silent. Alex's condemnation was the last straw.

As she went drearily up the stairway, Charlotte's thoughts turned with a great longing to her guardian and the quiet house in Philadelphia. He did perhaps care a little for her. He had sent her here because he thought it best, but it had turned out a terrible mistake. She would write to-night and tell him so. Tell him how impossible it was to endure it any longer, and implore him to send her to boarding-school.

But would he understand? It was so difficult to write things. If only she could be with him and Cousin Francis for half an hour and tell them her story, she was sure she could make them see the matter as she did. And now a daring thought entered her mind. Why not go to them? Naturally self-reliant, the thought of the long journey by herself did not terrify her. In the little silver purse (Aunt Cora's parting

gift) were two gold pieces,—more than enough to buy a ticket to Philadelphia.

Charlotte's misery grew less at the picture her imagination drew of her aunts' consternation when her flight should be discovered. Probably there would be more talk; but little would she care, safe with Uncle Landor.

Carried away by the excitement of the idea, she found a daily paper and sat down in the dainty room prepared for her with so much loving care by Aunt Virginia not three months ago, to study the time-table and lay her plans.

There was a through train at half-past eight at night which would exactly suit. She could steal away after supper. It was the evening for Aunt Caroline's Antiquarian Society, and Aunt Virginia could be easily eluded.

In stories people who ran away usually left notes. Charlotte considered this, and decided she would write one to Aunt Virginia. It took a long while and a great deal of note-paper was wasted before it was done, and her enthusiasm had cooled a little as she folded it.

She carried a flushed face and an abstracted manner to the supper table, but her aunts were

evidently too much interested in some matter they were discussing to notice her. If she had been less absorbed, her curiosity would have been aroused by the guarded manner in which they talked.

"It is a case where duty seems to call one in opposite directions," said Mrs. Millard, studying the handle of her spoon with an air of profound seriousness that provoked one of those occasionally profane suggestions from her sister.

"You'll have to toss up a penny," remarked Miss Virginia.

The thought of Aunt Caroline tossing a penny caused Charlotte a moment's diversion, and a faint smile curled about her lips as Aunt Virginia promptly took it all back.

"I realize, of course, Caroline, that it is hard to decide; but, really, I think you can't refuse Georgiana."

"I shall take the matter under careful consideration till to-morrow," replied Mrs. Millard.

Before they left the table Miss Sarah Leigh looked in to ask Virginia about a Mount Mellick stitch. Thus fortune seemed to favor Charlotte's plans.

"Are you going to study, dear?" Aunt Virginia asked.

Charlotte flushed at the kind tone. "I am going upstairs, Aunt Virginia," she answered. "I am tired."

If Aunt Virginia's kindness weakened her resolve to run away, an encounter with Aunt Caroline in the upper hall made it strong again.

While the servants were at supper and Miss Virginia occupied with the embroidery lesson, and just as Mrs. Millard left the house by the front door, a slight figure in a long gray coat with a blue veil over her face slipped down the back stairs, bag in hand, and out of the side door.

Pleasant Street was full of swaying shadows, for the wind had risen and the electric light on the corner swung slowly to and fro. Charlotte held to the gate a moment to steady herself; she seemed swaying, too. Not a single person was to be seen. For the first time in her life she was alone on the street at night. She told herself there was nothing to fear, but she looked wistfully at the lighted windows of the houses along the Terrace, and the cheerful glow

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that shone from the little shop across the way; but she did not think of going back. It was not far to the street-car, which would take her to the door of the station; after that all would be perfectly simple.

## CHAPTER TWELFTH

### THE DISCOVERY

IT was still early when Miss Sarah rolled up her work, saying her aunt was not well and must not be left any longer alone.

After she had gone Miss Virginia moved about the drawing-room, pushing chairs back into their places, changing by a few inches the position of some ornament, and rearranging the folds of the curtains. Meanwhile she was thinking that, in part at least, the problem that had been weighing upon her was about to be solved. She had not felt so cheerful in weeks.

At last she was to have a chance to redeem herself and silence that troublesome conscience which continually reminded her she was shirking her duty. Her relief was not unmixed, for at times she felt convicted of disloyalty.

Ever since the episode of the spool of twist Caroline had been a little disagreeable, though in an intangible way that hardly stood analysis.

Where Charlotte was concerned, Miss Virginia considered her sister's severity extreme, and she had been hurt that her own protest and plea of extenuating circumstances should have been so scornfully dismissed. Now if events turned out as they promised, all would be well again. If only she dared give Charlotte a hint. The child looked pale and unhappy.

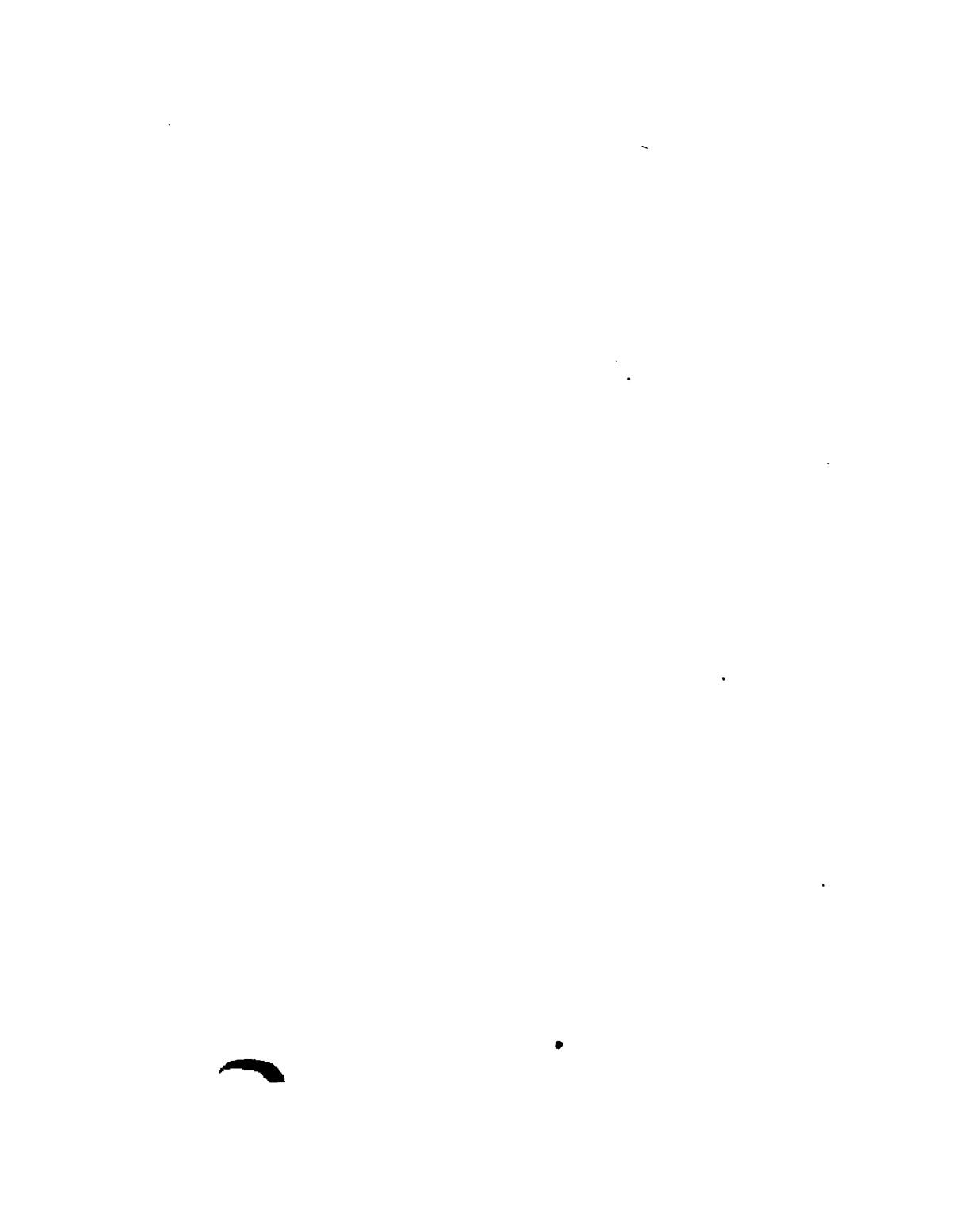
Could there be any harm in saying to her that something was about to happen which would make everything right? Miss Virginia resolved to do it. There could be no reasonable doubt as to what Caroline's decision would be. She ran upstairs light-heartedly.

Charlotte's door was closed, perhaps she was already asleep. Softly Miss Virginia turned the knob. The room was dark, except for the outside electric light that threw a vivid shadow of the window-frame and curtain on the opposite wall. She crossed the room to lower the blind, and as she did so, discovered the bed was unoccupied.

With nervous haste she searched for the matches. Why did she tremble so? It seemed an age till she found them. No, Charlotte was



SHE SANK INTO A CHAIR.



not there; but how absurd to be alarmed, she must be somewhere in the house. Mechanically Miss Virginia began to fold a ribbon that lay on the dressing-table. Then her eye fell on a folded paper addressed to herself. Scarcely able to breathe, she sank into a chair and opened it. It was written in a large, schoolgirl hand.

“DEAR AUNT VIRGINIA: I am going away to Uncle Landor. I am sorry to give you so much trouble. I am going to ask him to send me to boarding-school, because I can’t stand it any longer. I know how to go to Philadelphia, and I have money enough. I did not mean to be deceitful, but Miss Alex said I was, and that I was making you miserable, so I think I ought to go.

“Your niece,

“CHARLOTTE CRESTON.”

To Philadelphia—that child! Miss Virginia, who never travelled alone, was overcome with the terror of it. What could she do? Was it too late to stop her? Oh, for some one to help! She ran out into the hall, but something checked her first impulse to call the servants.

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At what hour did the evening train leave for the north? She hastened downstairs for the paper.

"It is all my fault! all my fault!" she murmured to herself, as with trembling hands she searched for the railroad column. It was too late; the train must have left half an hour ago.

She must consult somebody. Surely, something could be done. Opening the front door, she looked out into the night. A bright light shone from the Russells' across the way. Forgetting to close the door behind her, she hurried over the street and rang the bell.

She told the servant tremblingly that she wished to speak to Miss Alex, who presently came to her in evident surprise.

"Why, Miss Virginia! Is anything the matter?"

"Oh, Alex, something dreadful has happened!" In her agitation it was not possible to say more.

"Is any one ill?"

"No, it is Charlotte — she has gone!"

"Gone?" echoed Alex. "But do come in, Miss Virginia."

"I can't; I left the door open. I don't want people to know. Oh, Alex, what shall I do?"

"I'll go back with you," said Alex. "I don't understand yet what has happened. Where has Charlotte gone?"

Once inside her own door, Miss Virginia thrust Charlotte's note into Alexina's hand. "What shall I do?" she cried. "That long journey alone, and it is all my fault!"

"Don't say that; I am afraid it is partly mine. I was hard on her this afternoon, but I didn't dream— There must be some way to stop her,— by telegraphing ahead, you know. I wonder— It should be done at once. The train left half an hour ago, you say?"

Miss Virginia nodded; words were beyond her.

And now into the drawing-room, where they stood in agitated uncertainty, walked Miss Pennington, the shopkeeper. Her face was flushed, her hair a little disordered by the wind, but she was smiling, and somehow her presence seemed at once to relieve the tension.

"Perhaps you can help me," cried poor Miss Virginia, hardly knowing what she said.

"I am sure I can," answered the stranger,

going to her and taking the trembling hands in her own firm ones. "Are you worried about Charlotte? If you are, I have come to tell you she is safe, and is not going to Philadelphia to-night."

"You are sure? How do you know?" cried Miss Virginia, in bewilderment.

Alex drew near in surprise. She had not at first recognized Miss Pennington.

"I'll tell you about it as quickly as I can, but you must sit down;" and Norah drew her to a sofa, where, sitting beside her, she explained that her friend, Miss Carpenter, had had occasion that night to go to the station with her maid, whose nephew was to pass through the city on his way to a western army post. In the waiting-room her attention had been attracted by the efforts of a man to annoy a little girl. Finally it became so marked, and the child seemed so alarmed, that Miss Carpenter interfered, and appealed to a passing official. Then, surprised that a girl of her appearance should be travelling alone at night, she questioned her; and thoroughly frightened, Charlotte had revealed the fact that she was running away.

"Miss Carpenter is a very decided person,

and when she understood the matter, would not let her go, but instead brought her home, where we talked it over. I hope you won't think me very presuming when I say that it seemed to us if there were any way of keeping it quiet, it would be so much better. It was just the momentary rebellion of a high-spirited girl. I know she is sorry now."

"Caroline need never know a thing about it," exclaimed Miss Virginia, looking at Alex.

"I am sure that would be best. I'll never speak of it," answered Alex.

"Then I'll bring her over," said Norah, rising. "She is a good deal excited, so I offered to come over and pave the way."

"You can tell her I will be as good to her — things are going to be very different." Tears came into Miss Virginia's eyes.

"I am sure you are always good. I haven't the least doubt she was naughty, but girls are very foolish sometimes." Norah looked at Alex as if she might be expected to agree to this.

A very pale, subdued Charlotte made her appearance soon after. There was nobody to

receive her but Aunt Virginia, who waited at the door.

Little was said that night. "We'll just pretend it never happened, dear," Aunt Virginia said tearfully, as she took her into her arms and kissed her. "You didn't know it, but your Aunt Caroline is going away for the winter," she added. "It is a secret yet, but she is going very soon; and I was thinking you and I would have such a good time, and then—" They both fell to crying over this in a manner to suggest to one unenlightened that a good time without Aunt Caroline would prove but a dreary affair.

"I am so sorry, and I am going to be good," Charlotte whispered, when her aunt came to tuck her in. "And oh, Aunt Virginia, they are lovely! They were so good." This, of course, referred to the shopkeepers.

"I didn't thank Miss Pennington; I didn't say one word, so far as I remember," exclaimed Miss Wilbur, "and she was certainly kind. I shall have to go over and express my appreciation. Judging from her appearance she is a charming young woman."

## CHAPTER THIRTEENTH

### AFTERWARD

THE newly built fire crackled and blazed merrily, putting to rout what little daylight sifted through the slats of the window-shutters. How pleasant to lie there safe and warm! Charlotte hugged her pillow in thankfulness.

Far from being the heroine she had imagined herself, she realized she was only a foolish little girl. For once she felt the truth of that objectionable phrase. The experience of the night before had subdued her. She went all over it as she lay there, waiting for the rising bell.

On her way to the station the persistent stare of a man who sat opposite in the street-car made her uneasy; and when at the station, after she had bought her ticket, he again appeared and attempted to talk to her, even following her when she changed her seat, her uneasiness became alarm.

The dreadful loneliness of that great station, with its hurrying crowds, she would not soon forget.

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If it had been day, Charlotte was sure she would have been braver. In her despair Miss Carpenter came to her rescue. She recalled vividly how the young lady swept down upon her tormentor, with blazing eyes, demanding imperiously what he meant by annoying a little girl; and then Charlotte, clinging to the friendly hand held out to her, had allowed herself to be led meekly away. It was all over in a moment, and in a quiet corner out of the crowd she was replying brokenly to the questions of her rescuer.

Why was it that under the serious gaze of those dark eyes all her self-confidence and determination had oozed away? Miss Carpenter's manner was kind, but her decision had been prompt and final. It seemed to Charlotte no one could have resisted her.

"My child," she said, still holding Charlotte's hand, "you cannot take such a journey alone. I cannot let you. Come home with me, where we can talk it over. We'll find some way out of the trouble." And she added: "You live on the corner of Pleasant Street and the Terrace, don't you? I think I have seen you there. I am Miss Carpenter of the shop."

In a sort of bewilderment Charlotte had submitted, and escorted by Miss Carpenter and the elderly maid she rode back to the Terrace. And that half-hour in the shop, where they found Miss Pennington comfortably established by the fire with a book! Charlotte could still feel the atmosphere of sympathy and reason that enveloped her as she poured out her story to these strangers with all the pent-up unhappiness of the past week. How gently they had pointed out that running away would only add difficulties to the situation.

Her face grew hot now at the thought of how silly she must have seemed to them. And she wished these young ladies to think well of her,—which, of course, they never could do.

Aunt Virginia had been good, too. A wave of warm affection surged up in Charlotte's heart, and with it a determination to be a comfort to her after this. As she dressed, she wondered if she would ever again be free from this dreadful feeling of shame. She hated to go down to breakfast, even though Aunt Caroline did not know.

Later in the day Aunt Virginia called her

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into her room and closed the door. There was a pretty flush on her face as she sat erect in an arm-chair which, like the other furniture in the room, had been her grandmother's. Beside her on a table was an old Bible with yellow leaves, and some ancient books of devotion.

"I have been talking to your Aunt Caroline," Miss Wilbur began.

Charlotte started.

"I do not mean about last night. While I feel almost deceitful in keeping it from her, I have decided to do it. As I told you, your Aunt Georgiana is out of health and must go to California, and it seems Caroline's duty to go with her. This will leave you in my charge. You were really put in my charge at first, but I felt inexperienced and—" Miss Virginia hesitated, then continued: "What I have been thinking is this. I should like to try again, starting fresh and forgetting all that has happened. I think if you would promise always to be frank with me, and perhaps put up with some things that seem to you foolish and old-fashioned notions, that we could get along together. I loved your mother, and I want to love you and have

your affection. But if you cannot be happy, I will write to Mr. Landor and explain — ”

“ Aunt Virginia, I do love you. I don’t want to go away. I am so sorry about last night! ” Charlotte buried her face in her aunt’s lap.

“ Don’t cry, dear. It is all over, then, and we will forget it.” Miss Virginia caressed the brown head.

“ But I am so ashamed. It hurts—I can’t forget.”

“ Well, dear, perhaps you had some excuse. Caroline overlooked the fact that you have lived an unusually independent life, and I think she did not just understand how you felt about Lucile. I don’t mean you were right to go there, but— Well, from now on you are my charge, and the punishment is over. After this we’ll try to understand and trust each other.”

“ I am going to be good; you’ll see,” Charlotte whispered, her arms about her aunt’s neck.

She felt impatient to show Aunt Virginia she was really in earnest. What could she do? As she dressed for the evening an idea occurred to her. With many a pang she shook out her

wavy brown hair and combed it resolutely back from her face. It had always taken an absurd length of time to arrange that drooping mass in just the proper manner, but Lucile had commended her skill. It was much easier to brush it back in a way to show how prettily it grew about her forehead, but Charlotte really considered herself a fright as she tied a blue ribbon on her long braid.

The change gave her rather a chastened look, combined as it was with a timid self-consciousness when she entered the dining room. Her aunts surveyed her with evident astonishment.

"Well, Charlotte," Mrs. Millard remarked, affably, "you are really a nice-looking little girl when you let yourself alone."

Aunt Virginia patted her hand and said nothing, but Charlotte felt sure she understood.

## CHAPTER FOURTEENTH

### MRS. MILLARD DEPARTS

RELIEVED and thankful though Miss Virginia felt, and confident, too, that she and Charlotte would now get on very well together, she still had something on her mind. The feeling that she was concealing something from her sister weighed upon her, but not so heavily as her sense of obligation to the shopkeepers. In her agitation she had hardly thanked Miss Pennington; and the more she considered it, the more remarkable their kindness and thoughtfulness appeared. Would Caroline call it officiousness?

Mrs. Millard had gone so far as to acknowledge the shopkeepers *seemed* to be persons of refinement, and their effort to make a living was, of course, creditable; but she feared they did not quite know their position. Perhaps they were from some small town, where social distinctions were overlooked.

"Perhaps they are well born, but have lost their money and have to do something," Miss Virginia suggested, thinking that the manners of the young women in question were not in the least rustic.

Ignoring this her sister continued: "It is quite evident to my mind that they are pushing. Why else should they have come into a neighborhood like this, instead of going where they belong, among other shops? They evidently hope for some social recognition, and this is why I lay stress upon not giving them our patronage in any respect. I see plainly they will leave no stone unturned to ingratiate themselves."

Did this account for Charlotte's rescue? Miss Virginia shivered at the thought. It had seemed to her the extreme of neighborly kindness. One thing was certain,—Miss Carpenter had not invented the occasion. Had she seized it in the hope of advancing her own interests? Miss Virginia felt this was silly.

How friendly and helpful Miss Pennington had seemed! Could a commonplace, pushing young woman have so won Miss Virginia's heart? She lay awake at night thinking about it, won-

dering how she could suitably express her gratitude and at the same time preserve a distant dignity. In the silence and darkness all sorts of dreadful possibilities floated through her mind. Perhaps these harmless-looking young women were adventuresses, come into the neighborhood with some deep scheme, and the attractive shop as a blind. They might be burglars. One read of astonishing things done by women in these days.

Miss Virginia felt impatient over this new problem, and her irritation caused a display of unusual spirit when her sister began to give her parting instructions.

"You'd better send the drawing-room curtains to Lucinda in January," said that lady, thoughtfully, balancing her pencil above the pad on her knee. "I have made a list —"

"It is quite unnecessary, Caroline," interrupted Miss Virginia; "I kept house for a good many years without you, and you can't expect to run things here while you are in California."

"It seems to me, Virginia, you use very unbecoming expressions. I have no desire to *run things*; I only supposed you would be glad of a few suggestions."

"I am sure I don't wish to be rude, but I will be frank and tell you, Caroline, that I mean to do as I please while you are away."

Mrs. Millard gazed at her in surprise. "Why, Virginia, one would suppose you had been a captive in chains! Very well, I wash my hands of it all,—only," relapsing into a tone of pathetic reproach, "you do such singular things at times, you know."

She was manifestly shaken by this declaration of independence, but she was committed to her older sister. It was too late to change her plans. She ventured one parting injunction. "Pray, Virginia, do not patronize the shop. Let me beg of you, if you have any regard for me."

In Mrs. Millard's sudden departure the Terrace naturally felt an interest.

"So Caroline's going to leave us," Judge Russell remarked at the breakfast table. "We shall be free to do as we please this winter. I'll have that poplar set out in February."

"Aren't you ashamed, grandfather!" laughed Madelaine. "As if you had not strength of mind to do as you like."

The judge smiled as he stirred his coffee. "Caroline is a forceful woman; and then, too, she is generally right. It may be, as she says, the tree will not grow, but I want to try it."

"I wonder she is willing to leave Virginia all the responsibility of Charlotte. She is such a headstrong child, and so northern," said Mrs. Russell.

"Now, mother," expostulated Alexina, "isn't that dreadfully narrow?"

"What harm is there in liking your own part of the country best?" asked her sister.

"I did not mean any such thing," cried Alex. "I only insist that no locality has the monopoly of nice people."

"But some peculiarities are northern and some are southern, and I don't see that it is narrow to prefer one sort above the other," Madelaine persisted. "How can Mrs. Millard make up her mind to leave the shop?" she continued. "Miss Sarah has gone over to the enemy, and Alex is going."

"I don't understand about that shop," said her grandfather, not for the first time, by any means. "I told you about that young lady who

so kindly picked up my books,—a most intelligent person, and as pretty as—as Madelaine.” This with a smile at his youngest granddaughter.

“Here is another conversion,” laughed Madelaine.

“I can’t understand about the shop,” the judge repeated.

“Why isn’t keeping a shop just as respectable as teaching or keeping boarders?” asked Alex. She had in truth been strongly attracted to Miss Pennington that evening at Miss Wilbur’s, and had a secret desire to see more of her.

Wayland Leigh brought the news of Mrs. Millard’s proposed departure to his two aunts. He had it from Madelaine Russell.

“I wish you could have such a trip, Sarah,” said Mrs. Leigh. “It would do you a world of good. As Aunt Nancy used to say, you are so thin you have to stand up twice to cast a shadow.”

“Caroline is going from a sense of duty, you may be sure. And what would my boarders do while I was skylarking in California?” her niece demanded. This was a mild joke, for the boarders had not as yet materialized.

"I wish you would give up that idea, Aunt Sarah," growled Wayland.

"You agree with Mrs. Millard, I suppose. She thinks it involves the whole Terrace in a downward step. But what am I to do? Caroline assured me she could secure the position of matron at the Children's Home for me, but what would you and Aunt Sally do then, poor things?"

"Oh, it is easy to laugh—" began Wayland.

"Is it? Then I wish you would favor us sometimes, my dear nephew."

"I was going to say," continued Wayland, with dignity, "that it was easy to make fun of Mrs. Millard, but she is my idea of an elegant woman."

"Far be it from me to deny Caroline's elegance. I am often proud to know her. I believe there could be no emergency great enough to make her say 'hello!' over the telephone, and I saw her on one occasion put up her lorgnette when she answered a call."

"Now, Sarah," said Mrs. Leigh, laughing.

The two ladies talked on about neighborhood affairs, but Wayland paid little heed, being

absorbed in his own thoughts. He was in an impatient and critical mood. What he considered his aunt's oddity annoyed him. He wished she would dress like other people,—meaning Mrs. Millard. He was twenty years old, and was working in a bank for fifty dollars a month, with small chance of promotion. He had wished to go to college,—not so much, however, as his aunt had wished it for him,—but now this was overshadowed by the ambition to be rich. And all for Madelaine. Sometimes he fiercely resolved that he *would* be rich; and again he lost heart at the thought that lovely, dainty Madelaine was certain to find another palace long before his was built. Her frank worldliness did not weaken his adoration, strange to say.

## CHAPTER FIFTEENTH

### GIANT DESPAIR

"**M**ISS NORAH, I am afraid Miss Marion is falling back." Susanna stood in the doorway, a tea towel in one hand, a cup in the other.

Norah, who was putting in order certain shelves before the day's work began, asked, "Why do you think so, Susanna?"

"Well, Miss Norah, I caught her walking around the house with her eyes shut, feeling her way like she was trying to get used to it." Susanna advanced and spoke in a whisper, "And she hasn't had a smile for anybody this last day or two. Haven't you noticed it?"

"To tell the truth, I have, Susanna; but, after all, it is not unnatural. The excitement of getting settled and beginning work made her forget, and now the novelty is wearing off she has, as you say, slipped back. All this rain and fog is in itself depressing. Don't worry, Susanna.

Hasn't everything I promised you come true up till now?"

"I suppose so, Miss Norah," was the reluctant answer.

"Then don't worry, and I'll let you keep shop this afternoon."

Where the shop was concerned, Susanna was like a child; and nothing pleased her more than to be left in charge for an hour or so. Her own domain, the three bedrooms, dining room, and kitchen, she kept in spotless order, creating the daintiest repasts as if by magic, and seeming always to have time to spare.

She went back to her dishes, and Norah worked away with a thoughtful frown. Presently Marion entered and dropped into a chair with a weary sigh. "It is a horrid day," she said.

"There is a bit of blue in the west; by afternoon it may be pleasant," Norah responded.

When one is immersed in gloom, the sight of determined cheerfulness is irritating. So Marion found it.

"The air is so heavy one can hardly breathe," she went on. "I believe I'll let Susanna attend to the plants; I am tired."

"I have time to do it," said Norah, closing the door of the case.

Marion rose impatiently. "You shall not touch them. If Susanna cannot do them, I will."

"Susanna would cut off her hand if you asked it; but I know she has more than usual to do this morning, and we agreed the shop was to be our part. I am not in the least tired. Please, Marion!" Norah stood between her and the door.

"Very well. I shall attend to it myself," and Marion swept by her.

"O dear!" sighed Norah, "I feel like a tyrant; but she must not give up."

Marion returned presently and began washing the palms and clipping away the dead leaves. She worked listlessly, her face wore an expression of deep melancholy.

A diversion was created by the entrance of James Mandeville. He had been kept in several days by a cold, and the joy of release radiated from his small person.

"Mammy says she reckons the sun's going to shine by and by, so she let me come," he announced.

"Mammy and I are of the same opinion, then," said Norah, helping him off with his coat. "Can't you think of something to cheer Miss Marion? She is very tired of this rainy weather."

"I'll sing her a song, that's what I'll do," James Mandeville cried eagerly. "You wait."

He disappeared into the next room, where presently his voice was heard uplifted in "Onward, Christian Soldiers," and if the tune was a trifle uncertain, nothing was lacking in spirit. Through the open door he marched, holding the morning paper before him, and proceeding the length of the shop.

"One in hope of *doctor*, one in *cherry tree*," he proclaimed lustily.

Even Marion must smile a little at this.

"It is beautiful," said Norah, "though I don't quite understand it. I seem to feel a sort of connection between the doctor and the cherry tree, too."

"There's a heap more of verses," James Mandeville assured her. "Do you feel better?" This to Marion.

Who could resist? She laughed as she drew him to her and kissed him. "I am cross this

morning, and you are a nice boy to sing for me. I make life very hard for Miss Norah. Suppose you go tell her I am sorry."

James Mandeville trotted off obediently to find Norah, who had left the room a moment before. Marion, having finished with the plants, was absently looking out of the window when the door opened with a jerk and some one bounced into the shop. Turning with a start, she recognized the personage Norah called Giant Despair.

"What do you mean?—" he began, then paused and stared about in bewilderment. "Where am I?" he demanded; and as Marion advanced he removed his hat, displaying a massive head covered with shaggy gray hair.

"We call this the Pleasant Street Shop," she answered.

"See here—I thought it was the plumber's. I am getting so blind I shall soon have to be led around. So you call this a shop? Does it belong to you? For I can tell you now you have made a mistake in coming here." His voice was gruff, and as he spoke he peered this way and that, as if to get some idea of his surroundings.

"If we can't make a success here, we will go elsewhere, but we are doing very well," Marion said. "The plumber is on the next block."

"I know that now. I am not losing my mind as well as my sight."

Something impelled Marion to say, "I am sorry about your eyes. Can't something be done?"

"Sorry? How can you be sorry? Nobody knows anything about it who hasn't tried it."

"I have lived in constant fear of blindness for a year." Marion seldom spoke of her eyes, but the sight of trouble like her own broke down her usual reticence.

The old man softened. "You have? A young thing like you?" He peered at her in his intent way. "I guess you have grit," he said.

"Not much," she answered. "But my eyes are better, they tell me. Time will show. Can't something be done for yours?"

"Oh, yes, they are going to operate on the right one in the spring, but it is not likely to do any good; and then I shall have just half an eye left."

Norah and James Mandeville now entered unobserved.

"I have got to row up that plumber," Giant Despair continued, looking at his hat. "As I told you, I don't approve of a shop in this neighborhood, but I don't see anything that looks like one. Good day," and with a grim smile he went out more quietly than he had entered.

"Who would ever have expected a visit from Giant Despair?" cried Norah, "and he seems to have a bit of humor about him, too."

"I am sorry for him. He looks as if he had no one to take care of him, and he is nearly blind, as you can tell," said Marion.

When Mammy Belle came for her charge at noon, Marion asked her if she knew anything about old Mr. Goodman.

"Yes'm," answered Belle, "I knows him, Miss Marion," smoothing her apron.

"Does he live alone in that big house on the Terrace?"

"Yes'm, and he's mighty rich and crusty. He don't waste no pleasant words, and he don't waste no money. Law, Miss Marion, he's got rusty dollars layin' up in bank."

"Rusty dollars?" repeated Norah.

"Yes, honey, been layin' thar so long they's rusty. Get up offen the floor, James Mandeville. You won't have no skin on your knees, fust you knows."

"Then will I have to be born again to get some?" inquired the small boy, sitting back on his heels to consider the matter.

"Law, chile, what you talkin' 'bout? You mus' think you's Nickorydemus! Miss Norah's settin' there laughin' at you. Come 'long home with mammy."

"Isn't there a delightful variousness about our neighborhood?" said Norah. "Do you see that sun? Tell me I am not a prophet!"

"You are an angel to put up with me," sighed Marion, but her face was no longer gloomy.

"I have been constructing a grab-bag, and you shall have the first grab;" and Norah brought out a bag made of rainbow ribbons. "This is outwardly symbolic of the cheer within. The principle on which it works is simple. Whenever I find a consoling sentiment, I write it on a card and drop it in, then when I am low in my mind, I take one out. Help yourself."

"What an absurd person you are!" said Marion,

obediently putting her hand in and drawing out a card. She read:—

“Cleave ever to the sunnier side of doubt,  
And cling to faith.”

Norah looked over her shoulder. “That is good, isn’t it?”

Marion caught her hand. “You preacher,” she said, adding, “I accept it, dear, and I’ll try.” The visit of Giant Despair seemed the culmination of Marion’s depression. It was Saturday afternoon, and leaving Susanna in charge, they set out on an exploring expedition in the mood of two light-hearted children.

## CHAPTER SIXTEENTH

### CHARLOTTE

WITH the departure of Mrs. Millard a season of repose came to the Terrace. Charlotte and Miss Virginia actually found life a little tame after the excitement, for their neighbors were just then absorbed in their own affairs.

Miss Sarah and her aunt had some new boarders on which to expend time and thought, and Alexina was living a life of rigid usefulness, studying shorthand in secret and helping with the house work, for the Russell mansion was large and servants not numerous. She also made dainty things for that radiant butterfly Madelaine. Alex was a born milliner, but she rather despised her gift, even while acknowledging its usefulness.

The fame of the corner shop was spreading abroad till it was in a fair way to become fashionable. Charlotte, from her window where she studied, could see people passing in and out, and not infrequently a carriage stood before the door.

Sometimes she would forget her lesson in the interest of recalling her evening visit there. How cheery and cosey it had looked in the lamplight! Should she ever see it again? Miss Pennington bowed and smiled in a friendly way when they occasionally met, Miss Carpenter she had not seen again.

It occurred to Charlotte quite suddenly one day that it was something of a coincidence that there should be a Miss Carpenter across the street here, and while she was thinking about it she was called down to see—of all persons!—her guardian. Having business in the South, Mr. Landor had made it convenient to stop over a day or two.

She was so glad to see him she came near crying, a most unusual thing for Charlotte, and her guardian eyed her closely as she drew him into the library and seated herself on an ottoman beside his chair. Miss Wilbur was out, and there was nothing to interrupt them.

With her elbow on the arm of his chair, and her chin in her hand as she looked up at him, Charlotte at first had a dozen questions to ask concerning Cousin Frank and Mrs. Wellington, and Spruce Street affairs generally. But after a little,

Uncle Landor began to ask the questions, and then came the confession.

She unfolded the whole story, trying not to spare herself, though unable to conceal some resentment against Aunt Caroline. Mr. Landor listened in grave silence, and continued to look at her thoughtfully after she had finished. Charlotte's eyes fell under his scrutiny, but she quickly lifted them again.

"Was I deceitful? I did not mean to be."

"What do you think yourself?"

"I — but I tried to tell."

"Things were rather against you, Charlotte. I like to see you loyal. Do you still think this girl the sort of friend you care to have?"

Charlotte hung her head. "I don't know," she faltered. The truth was, Lucile's excess of devotion was beginning to grow tiresome. There were other of her schoolmates who, she could not help seeing, were more desirable as friends, but they now held aloof. It was hard to acknowledge that Aunt Caroline had been at least partly right.

Mr. Landor lifted the downcast face, and his gaze was kindly. "I believe you are learning

your lesson, little girl, but it has been a sharp one. It is always a mistake not to be straightforward. In all your life I fear you have never truly learned to obey. You are fast growing up now, and the responsibility will rest more and more upon yourself. Are you going to listen to the voice that speaks in your heart, and obey when the conflict comes?" He laid his hand on the brown head. "In spite of it all, you have improved, Charlotte."

"Do you mean my hair?"

"Have you done anything to your hair? I didn't know; it is very pretty hair. No, you have grown more gentle and womanly."

"I am happy with Aunt Virginia. She is a dear, and I feel so ashamed and sorry when I think how she would have felt if I had run away. Uncle Landor, is it that voice you spoke of—in our hearts—that makes us feel so dreadfully ashamed sometimes?"

"I suppose we may say it is in this instance. It is the judgment of the higher self upon the lower self."

Mr. Landor was a reserved and somewhat silent man, and never before had he talked to

Charlotte just as he did this afternoon. Till now she had been only a child to be petted or reproved. To-day he gently pointed out her faults, showed her how from now on it rested largely with herself what she would make of her life; he spoke of the guiding voice that all may hear who listen and who keep their hearts pure and loving, and last of all he put into her hand a little pocket Testament, in which he said he had marked certain things which had served him as guide-posts on the way, and might help her.

Charlotte was touched and pleased, and took the book with a very earnest promise to read it and follow its guidance.

After this they went on to talk of other matters. Charlotte pointed out the shop over the way, and gave an account of the neighborhood which showed such a keen appreciation of individual foibles, that her guardian found himself laughing heartily.

"Uncle Landor, I wish you would ask Aunt Virginia to let me go to the shop," she said. "I liked Miss Carpenter and Miss Pennington so much, and they were very good to me."

Mr. Landor spent several days in town, and

before he left, Miss Virginia herself asked his opinion as to the proper attitude toward the shopkeepers.

"They did me a great service, and in the excitement of that evening I cannot recall thanking Miss Pennington. I went into the shop the day after Caroline left, meaning to give some expression to my gratitude, but both the young women were out. I feel uncomfortable about it. I can't think as Caroline does, that they are trying to force themselves upon our notice. They really seem to be ladies. What would you advise?"

A smile illumined Mr. Landor's usually grave countenance at Miss Wilbur's earnestness.

"It is a thrifty-looking little shop," he said; "Charlotte pointed it out to me. And I should say, Miss Virginia, that you are perfectly safe in following your own instincts in the matter. To suppose their motives in helping Charlotte other than kindly seems to me both ungracious and absurd. You say they appear to be ladies. They probably are, but however that may be, you and Charlotte and I owe them our thanks."

Miss Virginia told Charlotte afterward that

she was greatly relieved. "For Philadelphia people are not likely to go too far in a matter of this kind. Then, too, Mr. Landor is a man, and able to judge whether they could possibly be dangerous persons."

Charlotte opened her eyes. "How could they be dangerous?"

"Well, my dear, they might be burglars, come to spy out the neighborhood, with the shop for a blind."

"Oh, Aunt Virginia!" laughed Charlotte.

"I am sure I have read of such things," the lady insisted stoutly.

Not long after this Charlotte received a letter from Cousin Francis.

"Father tells me you have been having your own troubles, little Char," he wrote. "Well, keep up a good heart and work hard. This is what I am doing just now. Things have not gone my way at all, but in spite of it I am going to try to do something worth while this winter. I often wish you were here to be my admiring critic."

A letter came from Mrs. Wellington also, relating chiefly to a package Aunt Cora had

commissioned her to send, but at the end she said: "Perhaps you will be interested to know the Carpenter house is closed. Miss May has gone away—not to be home for a year, they say—so if you were here, you could not watch for her as you used to do."

Was it on account of Miss Carpenter that things were not going Cousin Frank's way? Charlotte wondered, and began to think once more of the rose that was out of reach.

## CHAPTER SEVENTEENTH

### AN EVENING CALL

"**A**LEX, I am glad to see you. I was about to send Martha over for you; I am alone this evening. How very nice you look!"

It was an understood thing that if Alex had no other engagement, she was to take supper at the Wilburs' on Fridays. She stood before Miss Virginia pulling off her long gloves, looking indeed unusually handsome in a gown of pale gray and a plumpy black hat, which she had made herself with a sort of reluctant pleasure in its becomingness.

"I simply had to go to the Burtons'," she explained. "Madelaine was receiving, and mother insisted if I never went anywhere, people would begin to say she pushed me into the background and showed partiality. There is no arguing with her when she is in that state of mind, so I went."

"And enjoyed it, I am sure," said Miss Vir-

ginia. "I suppose I should have gone if Caroline had been at home, but to tell the truth, I forgot it. Charlotte was asked to a party,—one of her schoolmates,—and I was interested in seeing her dressed. I am glad the child is to have a little diversion; she has been as good as gold lately."

"I am certain you will not have any more trouble with her; Charlotte is a nice child," Alex replied with a half sigh. She felt that Charlotte had never quite forgiven her for her severity, and that Madelaine without any effort or care had won the place she had meant to hold in the little girl's regard.

Madelaine occasionally joined the Friday tea-party; to fascinate was as natural to her as to breathe, and Charlotte had been quickly won.

"You look sweet with your hair back," Madelaine had said, loosening the waves about Charlotte's forehead with fairy touches. "It was too extreme before. We could hardly see your eyes, and they are too pretty to hide."

Silly flattery, Alex thought, but she knew Charlotte would never return to the old way.

As she poured the coffee, Miss Virginia told

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Alex about Mr. Landor's visit and his decision in regard to the shopkeepers. "I was so surprised," she concluded, "for Philadelphians are so exclusive, you know."

"I think he is sensible. I wish one could do the natural, simple thing always," sighed Alex, "without thinking of dignity or position. It might be much more entertaining to associate with persons whose social position was different from one's own."

"Do you think so, Alex? If it were done generally, there would not be any social positions, would there?" Miss Virginia spoke as one who faced a deep problem.

"It would be heaven," answered Alex; adding, "suppose we go this evening."

"Alex! will you go with me? I am so relieved."

Later it appeared that unsuspected difficulties lurked in the seemingly simple matter of an evening call.

"Shall I take a card?" Miss Virginia paused on the stairway to inquire. "It is not quite an ordinary call, you know."

"I should take one if I were you; and let

me put my name on it," Alex answered, laughing.

On the porch Miss Wilbur paused again.  
"Shall we ask them to come to see us?"

"Need we mention it at all? Let them do as they see fit."

"Of course. You are very sensible, Alex." Miss Virginia sighed.

At the gate there was another delay. "I am afraid your mother will not like it. I don't want to lead you into mischief, Alex."

"Now, Miss Virginia, I proposed going with you, and I am going whether you go or not," and Alex linked her arm in her friend's, and drew her toward the corner.

"I don't know what Caroline *would* say; but then, she does not know the circumstances." After this remark, they crossed the street in silence, broken only by another sigh from Miss Virginia, as Alex touched the bell.

The maid who admitted them showed some surprise, but ushered them toward a half-open door at the end of the small hallway, Miss Wilbur's card in her hand.

"We'll just refer the matter to the *rich* Miss

Carpenter," a laughing voice was announcing as they entered a room, the first impression of which was that of a pleasant library, with its shaded lamps, open fire, and happy mingling of books and work; a second glance showed it to be simply the shop in evening dress.

The voice belonged to Miss Pennington who now came forward with a cordial greeting, and presented Alex and Miss Virginia to her friend, Miss Carpenter. Miss Carpenter's manner was somewhat distant in contrast, but seen without the disfiguring glasses she usually wore, Alex found her unexpectedly handsome.

"I have wanted so much to have an opportunity to thank you," Miss Virginia began, an evident victim to a terrible fit of shyness. "I came one afternoon, but you were out. You were both so kind to my niece," she looked at Miss Carpenter.

"I beg you not to think of it again. It was nothing at all. I happened to be at the station, and seeing how frightened she was, went to her rescue." Miss Carpenter spoke as one who dismissed a trivial matter.

"We were so interested in her," put in Miss

Pennington. "It occurred to Miss Carpenter that it might be possible to avoid the trying ordeal of explanations, so she brought her here to talk it over."

"Charlotte is a dear child," said Miss Virginia, "and all the trouble is over now." Then she added with a sudden accession of self-possession: "It may seem a small matter to you, Miss Carpenter, but perhaps you can understand it would have been a most serious and unhappy thing for me if the child had carried out her plan. I can't be thankful enough."

"I do see it, and I am very glad that, by a happy accident, I was able to be of service." Miss Carpenter's manner changed, her tone was soft, her smile winning. Alex, who was playing the part of spectator, suddenly warmed to her.

"I met your grandfather several weeks ago, Miss Russell," said Miss Pennington, turning to her. "He had an armful of books, and seemed to think I had done him a wonderful favor in picking up two he dropped in getting out of the car."

"He told me," Alex answered. "He was so pleased that you appreciated the value of his find."

"And he was so disappointed when he found I kept a shop," laughed Norah.

Alex smiled and flushed. "Grandfather has old-fashioned ideas about women supporting themselves, and then, too, the neighborhood was rather opposed to having a shop built here."

"I know," answered Miss Pennington, "but as it is here we flatter ourselves nothing could be less objectionable than *our* shop."

"You are undoubtedly winning us over. It seems to me a delightful occupation, but I suppose it is not so easy and pleasant as it looks."

"Of course it is work, but we find it pleasant. For several years I taught, but to keep a store has always been my ambition since I was three years old, and I at last persuaded my friend to join me in an experiment."

"You don't make all your lovely baskets, surely?" Alex asked, her eyes on the strings of raphia and an unfinished basket that lay on the table.

"Oh, no. It is work Miss Carpenter can do at times,—her eyes allow very little of any sort,—but most of our stock comes from a Mothers' Club in a settlement in which we are both interested. I

lived there for a time. You can't think how much it has meant to those women. They bring their babies with them, and they sing while they work, and the babies sleep or are entertained by their surroundings. Many of the patterns are original, and they have developed a wonderful sense for color and form in some instances."

"How interesting!" exclaimed Alex. "I don't see how you ever happened to come to a stupid town like this."

"Our pottery has a history, too. It is designed and decorated by two young women, and it has taken very well wherever it has been exhibited. But I do not mean to go on talking shop all the evening," and Norah paused with a smile.

"I like to hear about it. It has been such a puzzle to me to know what I could do to support myself. There seemed to be nothing but teaching or stenography, and I should hate both, I am afraid."

"If possible, do the thing you like to do, is my theory. There are a good many fields in these days, and still in almost any paper you can find a young lady who wishes to be a companion and is willing to travel."

Alex laughed. Miss Virginia was rising, and she reluctantly followed her example. "May I come again sometime?" she asked.

While Miss Wilbur and Alex were talking over their call, Charlotte came in in a flutter of gayety, her cheeks matching her rose-colored ribbons.

"I wish I could have gone with you," she said when she had heard of the visit. "Did they say anything about me?"

"You were mentioned," her aunt replied, pinching her cheek; and adding, "they are certainly very pleasant young women."

"They are charming," said Alex.

"I wonder if this Miss Carpenter could be any relation to the one who lives across the street from Uncle Landor?" said Charlotte.

"Did you hear what Miss Pennington was saying when we went in, Miss Virginia?" asked Alex.

"It was something about the rich Miss Carpenter, wasn't it?"

"*My* Miss Carpenter is rich," said Charlotte, and she related the romance, almost forgotten of late, which she had built upon Aunt Cora's remarks about the little portrait and upon Mrs. Wellington's stories.

"She is the granddaughter of Peter Carpenter," Miss Virginia said. "I have often heard my father speak of him. They were college mates. He was very rich and rather peculiar. He had a half-sister much younger than himself who once visited here on her way South. She and my oldest sister, Georgiana, were friends and used to correspond, but that was years and years ago. Mr. Carpenter — for some reason he was always called Peter — had only one child, a son, who was killed in a railroad disaster, probably twenty years ago. Your Miss Carpenter, Charlotte, must be his daughter."

"Carpenter is a common name; there may be a number of rich Miss Carpenters," said Alex, "but it would be a little odd if they should turn out to be connected in any way."

"I don't think they cared to talk about themselves," continued Miss Virginia, referring to the shopkeepers. "I am sure Caroline was wrong when she called them pushing."

## CHAPTER EIGHTEENTH

### THE ADVENTURES OF A BIRTHDAY CAKE

**I**N a great, handsome, dreary room sat Giant Despair. The December day was damp and cheerless, and the coal fire in the ugly old-fashioned grate beneath the elaborate marble mantel burned in a grudging, spiritless way. Above the uncurtained windows, with their shutters thrown wide upon a view of moist, bare garden, the heavy gilt cornices seemed to frown. Giant Despair was frowning as he searched in a massive black walnut secretary for a missing paper.

Things had gone wrong to-day. His housekeeper who knew his ways was absent on her annual vacation, and for the carelessness and stupidity of the servants he could find no adequate words. In truth he had exhausted his vocabulary early in the day, and now was reduced to inarticulate growls.

Against one of the maids in particular his anger burned. He had mislaid a paper brought to him

the evening before by his business agent; and now that it could not be found, the luckless maid was accused of making way with it.

She was a Swiss girl with a meek manner and eyes that belied it. Giant Despair could not see the eyes, and the manner annoyed him.

"If you please,— did you this day order a birthday cake?"

"What? Order what?" cried Giant Despair, turning in great rage to face the unfortunate maid.

She stood her ground. "A cake,— white, with candles of pink."

"Did I order a pink cake? What do you mean by asking such a question? You know I didn't." His frown was terrible.

"Candles of pink," corrected the girl, and holding up her hand she counted, "One, two, three, four, five."

"What is the woman talking about?" demanded Giant Despair.

"De confectionaire man bring it. He say it vas for here. He comes not back."

"Then telephone him to send for it at once. Why do you come bothering me about it?"

"We know not who sends it."

"Bring the thing here and let me see what you are talking about."

The maid retired, returning presently carrying a small cake covered with an elaborate white icing, and further decorated, as has been said, with five pink candles. This she set upon the desk, and, a gleam of — was it malice or mischief? in her eyes, slipped away.

"Humph!" growled Giant Despair, peering at the strange object, even resorting to his big magnifying glass that he might see it the better.

An innocent, saucy little cake, it was a wonder it did not shrivel and disappear amid those strange surroundings, beneath that unfriendly gaze.

Could this be a joke some one was playing on him? Giant Despair wondered. But who thought enough about him even for that?

"Take it away," he commanded; but Annie had vanished, and so the cake had a chance to tell its story.

In this gloomy, tiresome world, somebody was five years old to-day. Not very much of a story, but somehow it impressed Giant Despair

strangely. He leaned back in his chair, his frown relaxing a trifle.

He did not care for children ; they were meddlesome and noisy. He waged continual warfare against certain naughty boys on Pleasant Street, who, divining his dislike, resorted to all sorts of teasing tricks. They carried off his door-mat, unhinged his gate, favored him with uncomplimentary valentines, and robbed his grape arbor,—each in its season.

So far as this went, however, he could not be called a favorite with older persons. In the large drug company where he was still senior partner he was held responsible for the policy of extorting just as much work as possible for just as little pay.

Persons of forbidding countenances are fated to be harshly judged ; and the sins of others may have been laid at his door sometimes; but while his defective sight might be the cause of his frown, it remained that Giant Despair seldom spoke a kindly word.

The sympathy of that young woman in the shop, into which he stumbled by mistake, had touched him. She *knew*. It was not pity,—

that he despised,—but a sort of fellowship in misfortune, and he had seized upon it hungrily, even while he called himself a fool. Perhaps it was this slight but softening experience which made possible to-day the faint regret that a little child was to be disappointed about this cake.

Such feelings could not find a harbor for long in that impatient breast. Becoming aware of sounds in the hall, Giant Despair strode across the room and flung open the door, intending to demand the instant removal of the cake. He was confronted by a small boy in a red coat and cap who cried excitedly, “Has you got my birfday cake?”

“Hey? So it is yours, is it? And who are you?”

But its owner had caught sight of it through the open door; and pushing past Giant Despair, he lifted up his voice in a pæan of joy. “It’s here! it’s here! it’s here!” he cried, standing before the desk with clasped hands and uplifted eyes, like a worshipper before a shrine. “Somebody give it to me! It’s mine!”

“Where did that child come from?” asked Giant Despair, as he spoke becoming aware of the presence of some one else in the hall.

"I brought him, Mr. Goodman. It is Miss Carpenter of the shop." Marion advanced. "It is James Mandeville Norton, a small friend of ours, to whom we had promised a birthday cake. He was on the watch for it and was quite sure he saw it carried in here, and to pacify him I ventured to come and inquire."

If Giant Despair could ever be said to be affable he became so at this moment, to the evident astonishment of Annie, the maid. She could not know of the bond of sympathy that existed between this graceful young lady and her surly master.

"Why, how do you do? Come in;—ridiculous mistake. Glad to find the owner," he stammered, offering her a chair. "Fearful weather," he added, poking the fire.

"Very Novemberish," Marion agreed, declining the chair. "We won't trouble you further," she said.

"Somebody *please* give me my cake. It's mine; I know it's mine." James Mandeville's voice betrayed anguish of soul.

"He will let you have it, dear. Mr. Goodman doesn't want it. It was brought here by mis-

take," said Marion, reassuringly putting her arm around the child.

That any one could see such a cake and not want it was naturally beyond James Mandeville's powers of belief. He stood silent, looking from Marion to Mr. Goodman.

"Of course you can have it. What do I want with it?" asked the old man, grimly.

James Mandeville moved forward and slipped his small, soft hand into Giant Despair's big, hard one. "I'll tell you," he said, "you can come to the party, and I'll let you have a slice of it; and you can help blow out the candles."

The little voice was eager, but the confiding touch of the dimpled hand did most execution.

"We shall be glad to have you, Mr. Goodman," Miss Carpenter said, laughing. "The party is to be in the shop, and very select for the reason that our circle of friends is limited."

"There's going to be candy," added James Mandeville.

Giant Despair was embarrassed. "Thank you," he said; "I have not been to a party for a hundred years, and I am in too bad a humor to-day." Then it seemed necessary to explain

the cause,—the lost lease that had been burned or thrown in the ash barrel.

Miss Carpenter stood beside a table on which lay several large volumes; from the leaves of one of them the edge of a folded paper was visible. "Could this be it?" she asked.

"Pshaw! I put it there myself. Confound my eyes and my memory!" cried the old man.

Of course Giant Despair had no idea of going to the party, yet, strange to relate, he went. Miss Sarah Leigh met him striding down the street with two long, gray flannel ears and a beady eye visible above a bulging overcoat pocket. She turned to look after him, and was much amazed to see him disappear presently within the shop.

It was Jack, the flannel donkey, who really won the day. After the visitors had left, Giant Despair stumbled over him as he lay forgotten on the floor. The strange object was at first puzzling. He turned and twisted and felt it, until at length getting the right point of view he recognized it to be a donkey.

A toy animal was no less out of place in that

house than a birthday cake. He was going out for his daily walk ; he would leave it at the shop door. But once at the door he was lost, for James Mandeville seized upon him joyfully and would not be denied.

It was Saturday afternoon, and so a half holiday in the shop ; and it seemed to Giant Despair, as he stumbled in looking anything but festive, yet unable to resist his small captor, that there were a great many people assembled.

It turned out that the only guest was Charlotte Creston, who had been the first to discover James Mandeville bewailing the disappearance of his cake before Mr. Goodman's gate, some hours earlier, and after trying to console him had taken him back to his friends. This seemed to entitle her to an invitation, which she delightedly accepted. Mammy Belle and Susanna were there, also, to look on.

It is certain that never before in his life had Giant Despair participated in a scene of such childish gayety. He was exceedingly gruff and awkward, but no amount of gruffness could dismay James Mandeville.

The sight of Giant Despair seated at the small

table, personating the fifth guest for whom Miss Pennington assured him they had been on the lookout, and drinking a cup of tea in lieu of the goodies the young host pressed upon him, was one not soon to be forgotten. After a time he succumbed to the humor of it, and blew out his candle with the rest.

James Mandeville did his best to be entertaining. He sang, and recited Mother Goose, after which he climbed on Giant Despair's knee and asked for a story.

This was something Giant Despair couldn't do, but he showed the big seals on his watch chain, and dropped some bright new five-cent pieces into the chubby hand.

The old man walked home in a somewhat dazed condition. He told himself roughly that he had turned fool; and yet more than once that evening, as he sat by his lonely fireside, he felt again the pressure of James Mandeville's warm little body upon his knee and heard the childish voice, prompted by Mammy Belle, saying, "Thank you for coming to my party, Mr. Goodman."

## CHAPTER NINETEENTH

### TEA AND TALK

"**I** USED to think if ever I kept a shop there would be a bell on the door to jingle cheerily whenever a customer entered." Norah spoke from the window where she was occupied in making some changes. Outside the rain fell steadily, the terrace gardens had a soaked, dismal look, and the street was almost deserted, except for an occasional wagon.

"If it will add to your happiness, we will have it put in; but I doubt if you would be able to find one that would ring cheerily,—they usually jangle."

"I suppose that depends somewhat on the hearer; however, we must confine ourselves for the present to the strict necessities of life. Did it ever occur to you, Marion, how the old-fashioned bell is passing? When I was a child, the milkmen heralded their approach with bells; and maids would appear with bowls and pitchers and have the milk measured out to them from large tin cans."

"Your youth must have been in the Dark Ages. I never heard of such a thing."

"I am often impressed by your ignorance of simple matters. Yesterday, out in the south-western part of this very town, where I went to look for a seamstress, I heard again one of those bells rung lustily, and there was the tin can, as of old, riding majestically on the front seat of the wagon; but probably as a concession to modern prejudice the milkman was supplied with bottles, too. Come and tell me what you think of my rainy-day window."

Marion crossed the room. "It looks cheerful," she said, "but I hardly think it will bring us many customers to-day. It is too bad even for James Mandeville."

Norah had ransacked their stock for the brightest draperies, gayest baskets, and oddest jars, making of them a sort of barbaric medley not ungrateful to the eye, which she regarded with satisfaction.

"Well," she said, "if we have no customers, I shall have all the more time to give to collars. I am sorry I could not find a seamstress. I did not dream there would be such a demand."

"And there is probably some one who would be glad to do them if we only knew," said Marion. "Would it be worth while to advertise?"

Not troubled with much custom, the shopkeepers were working and chatting in the south window that afternoon, when Miss Sarah Leigh put her head in at the door.

"I hate to come in, I'm so wet," she said; "I'll leave my umbrella outside."

"You need not mind," said Norah, rising. "As you see, we have a large rubber mat and an umbrella-stand, and this is the first time we have needed them."

"Thank you. I had to go to the grocery, and as Aunt Sally was out of knitting cotton, I dropped in to get some. It is a dreadful day."

Norah pushed a chair to the fire. "Sit down and have a cup of tea. Miss Carpenter and I are just going to have some."

Miss Sarah accepted the chair. "I have no business to,—I have a thousand things to do; but this seems a veritable haven of rest."

Susanna now entered, a model of the respectable, elderly maid, carrying a tray which she placed before Marion.

"Another cup please, Susanna," said Marion; and while she poured the tea, Norah coaxed the fire into a blaze, remarking that it had fallen into the way of sympathizing with the weather.

"Are you in the habit of treating your customers in this fashion?" Miss Sarah asked, accepting the cup and helping herself from the plate of warm tea-cakes with which Susanna returned.

"This is a reward to rainy-day callers," answered Marion, smiling.

"Well, you are the most astonishing people I ever came in contact with. I hope you don't mind my saying it," Miss Sarah spoke confidentially. "I don't mean in respect to tea."

"Not at all," laughed Norah. "We, too, have our impressions of the neighborhood."

"I shouldn't be surprised if you had." Miss Sarah joined in the laugh. "Of course it is no secret to you that the neighborhood did not very much want you, and the way in which you are winning us over is a miracle. Miss Wilbur, Charlotte, Alex, and now you have captured Mr. Goodman. Charlotte told me about the party. How do you do it?"

"It has all come about through the merest accident," Marion explained.

"Such accidents don't happen to everybody. I think you practise witchcraft."

"James Mandeville and the birthday cake captured Giant Despair," said Norah, the name slipping out before she thought.

"So that is what you call him! Have you named us all? It suits him, too; but poor man, he has had his troubles, as have some of the rest of us." Miss Sarah looked meditatively into the fire. "Soon after he built his house in the Terrace," she continued, "his daughter, an only child, was burned to death. It was a sad thing,—she was just eighteen. Then a nephew whom he adopted turned out a scamp, and now he has lost faith in everything."

While she was speaking the shop door opened to admit Alexina and Charlotte, rosy and wet from a walk in the rain.

"I want a spool of twist," Charlotte announced merrily.

"Won't a cup of tea do? We are serving that at present," Norah asked.

"How pleasant!" Alex exclaimed as they

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slipped off their wet waterproofs. "Are you always cheerful over here?"

Charlotte sought Miss Carpenter's side. "I like tea," she said, the blue eyes showing, however, a fondness for something more than that innocent beverage. Just now this young lady had a profound fascination for her. Miss Alex and Aunt Virginia might prefer Miss Pennington, Miss Carpenter had her admiration.

"If you need anything more in the way of cheer, I will bring forth the grab-bag," said Norah, as she handed Alex some tea.

"That sounds interesting; do let us have it," begged Miss Sarah.

"You will be disappointed," Marion put in, mischievously, while Norah went for the rainbow bag. "You expect amusement and get a sermon. Its variegated hues give symbolic expression to the truth that 'behind the clouds the sun is still shining.'"

"You might add that its existence destroys the pleasing idea that we are always cheerful," Miss Pennington added, holding out the bag to Alex.

"Am I to take something?" Alex asked; and

putting her hand in, she drew out a card. “‘If we live truly, we shall see truly,’” she read. “But it seems to me it ought to be the other way. If we could see truly, we could live truly. It is such a puzzle. Do you think this is true? And what does it mean to live truly?”

“You are an animated problem, Alex,” Miss Sarah remarked.

“It is a little like something Uncle Landor said to me, that if we try to do right and keep our hearts pure, we will hear a voice telling us which way to go.” Charlotte spoke shyly.

Marion took her hand in a soft clasp, and Norah gave her a friendly smile. “Yes,” she said, “that is it. I will tell you what it means to me. It means that if I go straight on, doing each day the thing that comes to me, not allowing myself to become entangled in fears for to-morrow, that little by little the path will be made plain to me.”

“I am afraid I want to *know* where I am going. It might be such a waste of time,” said Alex.

“Its very simplicity makes it hard, but I believe it is the best way,” Norah answered.

"Are we allowed to have only one helpful sentiment at a time?" asked Miss Sarah.

"Certainly; one is as much as anybody can live up to at a time."

"It is not for lack of moral sentiments, however," Marion added. "The supply is constantly renewed. They naturally gravitate to Norah."

"I wish," remarked Norah, "that a seamstress capable of making stocks and collars would gravitate to me."

"Here is one at your side." Miss Sarah leaned over to examine her work. "I think I could do it."

"She can do anything," said Alex, waking up from a brown study. "But how would you find time, Miss Sarah?"

"If you could do only a few, it would be a help," the shopkeepers cried in the same breath, and Norah began at once to explain what was wanted, and unfold patterns.

Susanna carried away the tea things, and Alex joined Charlotte and Marion, who were talking about James Mandeville and Mr. Goodman.

"He has won the old man's heart," Marion was saying. "They have been walking together

several times, and James Mandeville always returns with a bag of what he calls *finger ladies*."

Miss Sarah's voice interrupted presently. "I don't know when I have spent such an eventful hour. I must take my knitting cotton and go. I know now where to come when I have the blues."

"It is worth while to give Miss Sarah a little pleasure," Alex said as the door closed behind her. "She is the bravest, brightest person, and her life is anything but easy." Then she returned to the consideration of the card she had drawn. "I am dreadfully puzzled over what I ought to do. I want to make my own living, and yet it is hard to go against the wishes of everybody at home. Do you really think if I just go on doing what comes to me that the way will open? It sounds lazy."

"No, it sounds serene. If I were you, I'd try it," said Norah.

## CHAPTER TWENTIETH

### MERRY HEARTS

MANY things combined in the Terrace to proclaim the season of the year. Great was the seeding of raisins, shelling of nuts, and slicing of citron for fruit-cake and puddings,—matters these housekeepers were wont to attend to themselves. Neighborly consultations were held also, and the relative merits of last year's cakes discussed.

"I really have no business making fruit-cake this season," Miss Sarah Leigh remarked over her grocery bill. "Everything is so expensive."

"Why, Sarah Leigh, who ever heard of Christmas without fruit-cake!" her aunt exclaimed.

"But you don't eat it, Aunt Sally."

"I shall this year."

Wayland ate it, if his aunt did not. He would be disappointed if she did not have one as usual; perhaps she could save in some other way, Miss Sarah thought. "After all, my

saving will be a good deal like Mrs. Green's keeping Lent," she told Miss Virginia. "She never, under any circumstances, went anywhere, and she didn't have dessert except on Sunday, and then she seldom ate it on account of her rheumatism, so there really seemed to be no way to deny herself any further."

Nevertheless, Miss Sarah ordered the raisins and other good things, and at night she sat up making collars and belts for the shop.

At the shop James Mandeville lay on the floor, poring over a profusely illustrated copy of "'Twas the Night before Christmas," bursting forth tunefully, now and then, with "*Susanna in the highest.*"

There was no manner of use in correcting him, he preferred his own versions, and stuck to them.

The window of the shop presented an ever changing variety of wares, from posters and colored photographs to baskets, bags, and pottery, all unique in their way. Besides the other things, Norah had done a motto in black and red letters, "A merry heart doeth good like a medicine," and hung it in the midst.

The popularity of the place increased. Susanna was often called in to help, and one day a society reporter, out for news, and directed there by Madelaine Russell, dropped in and interviewed them.

An elaborate description, with mention of the charming and intelligent young women who had it in charge, appeared next day in one of the papers. Miss Sarah immediately sent a marked copy to Mrs. Millard.

"We are becoming famous," laughed Norah, as she read it to Marion.

"I wish it did not have to be," said Marion, discontentedly.

"Ungrateful person that you are!" cried Norah.

The newspaper article brought Mrs. Leigh to the shop. Heretofore her opposition had been consistently maintained; but now, early one morning, she walked in, a picture of an old lady, with a close-fitting bonnet over her silvery puffs, a black silk circular lined with gray squirrel, and an old-fashioned reticule on her arm.

"I have just come to look around," she told

Norah. "I have heard so much of this shop, and it is not in the least like anything I ever saw before,—and neither are you, for that matter."

Then, as Norah laughed, she added, "I mean you are entirely too pretty for a shopkeeper. I'd like to know what you are doing it for, but of course you won't tell me."

"Oh, yes, I will. I am doing it for a living."

"Well, in my day a pretty girl like you wouldn't have had a chance to make her own living for long, but it is different now. I don't know whose fault it is."

All the while she was walking about, seeing everything, admiring or finding fault with equal frankness. Norah, who was delighted with her visitor, urged her to sit down and rest a few moments.

"Thank you, I believe I will. I am on my way out to my niece's to show her how to make a plum-pudding." She laughed a little, reminiscingly, and Norah looked interested.

"It makes me think of the time my husband was invited to dine at Dr. Gray's to meet a distinguished clergyman who had arrived unex-

pectedly. It was on Saturday, and when Mr. Leigh came home that evening he couldn't say enough about Mrs. Gray's plum-pudding. It was the best he ever ate, and I must get the receipt. I didn't say anything until next day. Mr. Leigh was mighty fond of dessert; and when he found there wasn't any for Sunday dinner, he looked terribly disappointed, and wanted to know why. 'The reason is, Mr. Leigh,' I said, 'because you ate it yesterday. I intended to have plum-pudding to-day, but as Mrs. Gray had unexpected company, I sent it over to her; and my own opinion is, it is more than you deserved to have had a taste of it.'

"Maybe you think he wasn't teased. He didn't hear the last of that very soon. Yes, indeed, it was all true. Mrs. Gray and I were good friends and often helped each other out in an emergency. Well, you will think me a most unprofitable customer; here I have talked a blue streak, as Sarah says, and haven't bought a thing."

"Nevertheless, I hope you will come again soon, and I wish success to the pudding," Norah said, following her visitor to the door.

Being off the beaten track of trade, the rush at the shop was over before Christmas Eve, and Marion and Norah, leaving Susanna in charge, went down town on a lark, as Norah said, and came home loaded with holly and mistletoe.

It was after their late dinner and Norah was putting up the last bit of holly, when Mammy Belle came in. "Miss Norah, honey, kin you trim a Chris'mus tree?" she asked.

"Why, yes, I have trimmed many a one."

"I done promise James Mandeville he should have one, for him an' his papa in the mawnin',—Marse Tom's comin' home; but look like I ain't got good sense, and I seed Miss Maimie do it las' year." Mammy Belle's tone was despairing.

"Never mind, we'll do it for you. I might have thought of it, only I have been so busy," said Norah. "Don't you want to go, Marion?"

Marion was more than ready for anything so in keeping with the night, and gathering up some unused holly and a box of ornaments for the tree, they accompanied Mammy Belle to the small house, half a block distant on Pleasant Street.

It was a tiny place, quite simply and tastefully furnished, but betraying in many trifling ways the absence of the mistress. James Mandeville was fast asleep in his crib upstairs, where Mammy Belle conducted them to peep at him.

"I hope Miss Maimie won't mind our doing this," Norah whispered, as they went down again.

"I don't believe she will," Marion answered, moving about the tiny parlor, changing the position of a table here, a chair there, till the whole room had taken on a new look. The tree in the corner by the window bore melancholy witness to Mammy Belle's lack of ability in that line, but under Norah's fingers it began at once to revive.

They were in the midst of the dressing, Mammy Belle looking on in delight, when there was a ring at the door, and of all persons, who should it be but Mr. Goodman with a large package under his arm!

"It is a horse for that little rascal," he explained, puffing and embarrassed.

"Come in and see our tree, Mr. Goodman," called Norah.

The old man stood in the doorway. "I have been stumbling round trying to find this place

for half an hour," he growled. "I took this thing to the shop, but you weren't there, and that Susan woman tried to direct me where to go."

"Ought you to go about by yourself at night?" Marion asked. "Won't you come in and wait for us? We are nearly through."

"And do look at this beautiful horse!" cried Norah, unwrapping a stately animal with flowing mane and tail. "Won't James Mandeville rejoice? Jack will be nowhere."

"I suppose boys like horses," said the old man, accepting the chair Mammy Belle brought forward, and evidently not indifferent to the admiration his gift excited.

The tree trimming went on, and presently returning to his usual attitude of mind, Mr. Goodman remarked that there was a sinful waste of money at this time of year.

"That is true," said Norah, pausing to study the effect of a paper angel in tinsel, "but also there is the money that *might* be spent to make people happy, and isn't."

"Come, Norah, really, we must not stay any longer. You have done quite enough," Marion was saying, partly in the wish to cut off a

possible argument, when the front door opened with a startling suddenness, and a young man with a bag in his hand stepped into the hall and faced the scene in the parlor,— the gay Christmas tree, the holly; Norah standing on a chair, with her laughing face over her shoulder; Marion, tall and stately, by the fireplace; and grim-looking Giant Despair in the chair of state.

"Why, Marse Tom," gasped Mammy Belle, "I done spect you in de mawnin'."

It was Marion who made the explanations,— their friendship for James Mandeville and Mammy Belle's difficulty with the tree, and she did it with a gracious charm of manner that was irresistible.

Mr. Norton's boyish yet careworn face flushed. "You are very kind to my little boy," he said. "I wish his mother were here to thank you."

"Why, Norton, is that you?" exclaimed Giant Despair, waking up. "Do you mean to tell me that James Mandeville is your boy? Upon my word!"

"It is fortunate you know Mr. Norton, for now you can testify to our good intentions in invading his house, Mr. Goodman," said Norah, laughing.

Mr. Norton was embarrassed. "I travel for Mr. Goodman's drug house," he said. Clearly he was not in the habit of meeting his employer socially.

"And you say they keep a shop, mammy?" This was after the guests had departed, and Belle had done her best to explain.

"Dey is ladies, anyhow," she insisted stoutly.

"That is very evident," said Mr. Norton.

"Jus' you ax James Mandeville in the mawnin'," added Mammy Belle. "He 'lows dat Miss Marion and Miss Norah done put the moon up, shore."

## CHAPTER TWENTY-FIRST

### THE RICH MISS CARPENTER

MISS VIRGINIA was writing to her sister. She had a great deal that was pleasant to relate, and her pen moved on smoothly. There was Charlotte's Christmas party which, with the assistance of Alex and Madelaine, had gone off successfully.

Lucile Lyle had been one of the guests, for as a classmate of Charlotte's it seemed necessary to ask her; but this Miss Virginia did not mention. She did say, however, that Charlotte's interest in Lucile seemed to have abated. This was quite true; indeed, there was a growing coolness between the once devoted friends.

The cause of this was a little girl, a year younger than Charlotte, who with her father and mother had recently come to board at the Leighs'. The Reeds were strangers in the city, and Miss Sarah had asked Charlotte to do what she could to make Helen feel at home.

They had taken a fancy to each other, and Charlotte enjoyed playing chaperon to Helen when she was entered at Miss Barrows's school. Helen was a bright girl with sweet, gentle manners, inclined to look up to Charlotte as older and more experienced than herself; and in their daily walks back and forth the friendship grew. Lucile chose to be jealous, and something very like what in schoolgirl language is called a fuss, followed. They no longer wore each other's rings, and Lucile sang no more of beauteous eyes.

Miss Virginia knew all about it, and took pleasure in mentioning to her sister that Charlotte's good sense had come to the rescue, and an intimacy was no longer to be feared. That Mrs. Millard had small confidence in her powers of discipline, Miss Virginia was well aware; but Charlotte's excellent school reports spoke for themselves.

After giving various items of neighborhood interest, she paused; glancing up, her eye fell on the shop across the way, and immediately a sensation of uneasiness took possession of her. With an elbow on her desk she continued to gaze out of the window, thoughtfully tapping

her cheek with her penholder. She had warned her sister that she meant to do as she pleased; at the same time, she had not intended to buy most of her Christmas gifts at the shop, and more than this, to remain to chat on several occasions. And yesterday Charlotte had come in with the announcement that Miss Carpenter was willing to show Helen and her how to make baskets if they would come over some evening. They were very eager to go. Could she refuse? The question interrupted her flow of thought; she put aside the letter to be finished some other time, and went in to see the Leighs.

She found Alexina in the sitting room with Miss Sarah and her aunt. Old Mrs. Leigh had the quilt she was making spread out on the couch for admiration and suggestions. Miss Virginia, after paying tribute to its beauties, mentioned the basket making, and asked for advice.

"Caroline insisted that they would push themselves into notice, and while I cannot see that they are pushing, they are certainly—"

"Getting there," suggested Miss Sarah. "Do

you know, Mr. Goodman has been in several times after the shop closed at five o'clock, to have Miss Norah read to him? Now, is that anything but pure kindness? I suppose Caroline would say they were after his money."

"I had not thought of his caring to be read to as he has John; but he told grandfather he got tired of John's reading, and there were some political articles in the *Nineteenth Century* Miss Pennington offered to read to him," said Alexina, who had made up her mind definitely that she wanted these shopkeepers for friends.

"I think that Miss Norah carries a cunning bag, as Malinda used to say," remarked Mrs. Leigh.

"They have not returned our call, Miss Virginia," said Alex.

"No, and if I could do just as I pleased, I'd like to know them better. I'd ask them to tea." Miss Wilbur spoke as one considering some daring departure from the path of propriety.

Miss Sarah laughed. "I wish you would," she said.

When Friday night came, Miss Virginia did not see her way clear to oppose the basket lessons, and in consequence found herself one

of a merry party in the shop. Alex had come over with them, and presently Miss Sarah ran in.

Alex was in one of her bright moods, and Miss Sarah kept them laughing over her first experiences in paying her taxes. Miss Carpenter, as she separated long strands of raphia and initiated her pupils into the art of twisting and stitching, was almost as merry as Miss Pennington, whose infectious laugh, as she related James Mandeville's latest speeches, kept them all in a gale.

Once in the course of the evening, Norah said, in reference to a remark of somebody's, "That reminds me of our friend the rich Miss Carpenter." And when the lesson was over, and Miss Virginia, beginning to murmur something about its being late, Charlotte suddenly announced, "I know a Miss Carpenter in Philadelphia."

There was an odd silence for a moment until she added: "At least, I don't exactly know her, but I have heard a great deal about her. She lives across the street from my uncle, and last spring when I was there I used to see them

take her out to drive. She had been ill, and I never really saw her. *She* is rich, and I wondered if she could be the Miss Carpenter you spoke of, Miss Norah."

It was Marion who answered the question. "She is the very one. Norah thinks a great deal of her, in fact,—is a little absurd about her."

"Why shouldn't I be? Hasn't she done everything for us?" cried Norah, stoutly.

"Then you have seen her," said Charlotte, delightedly. "Is she beautiful and—everything—as Mrs. Wellington said?" she looked at Marion.

"Ask Miss Pennington."

"I consider her handsome and charming, but Marion is a connection and ought to be able to tell you more than I."

"I am glad you know her, for I am very much interested in her because of a special reason."

"Charlotte, my dear," Miss Virginia spoke warningly, "it is really time we were going."

The discovery that Miss Carpenter of the shop was a relative of the Philadelphia Carpenters relieved Miss Virginia beyond measure. She sat

down at once to finish her letter and convey the news to her sister. She was vindicated; once more her conscience was easy.

The Terrace in general received the news with approval. That the shopkeepers were not exactly ordinary persons had been felt all along. Everybody had heard of Peter Carpenter. Possibly the shop was simply another manifestation of family eccentricities on the part of this cousin. It was easily settled that Miss Marion was a cousin,—probably a second or third cousin; for Miss Virginia knew about the family, and Peter Carpenter had had but one son.

Mrs. Russell, who went to the shop with Alex one day, was greatly impressed with Marion's bearing. "Any one can see she is not an ordinary person," she said.

"That must be because you know she is well-connected, mother," Alex replied. "Mrs. Millard could not see it."

"I trust I am not quite so prejudiced," Mrs. Russell said.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-SECOND

### VALENTINES

"UNDoubtedly our connection with the rich Miss Carpenter has affected our social position. The air is full of affability. Before we know it, we shall be in society." Norah looked up from her account-book to make this remark.

"As it is all your doing, I trust you are pleased," returned Marion.

"That pretty fraud, Madelaine Russell, asked me yesterday if she might not come with Alexina to the basket making next Friday," continued Norah. "Of course I had to say 'yes.' Now I think I'll ask that little type-writer girl I met at the mission. She is really a neighbor, for she boards in that tall, dreary house on the corner of Walnut and Pleasant streets."

"Why not ask her to dinner? I should really enjoy some company."

"A good idea, Marion. She looks hungry,—

I don't mean for dinner, but for something besides work. She is from the country. What have you in that bag, Infinitesimal James?—some more 'finger ladies'?"

James Mandeville, who had at that moment entered, nodded his head, speech being for obvious reasons out of the question.

"Eating in the shop is against the rule, except at afternoon tea," said Marion. "You must go outside, or join Susanna in the kitchen."

"Did you happen to meet Mr. Goodman this morning?" asked Norah.

"Yes, he buyed the finger ladies," answered James Mandeville, helping himself again from the bag, and then passing it around. "I am going to buy him a valentine," he added.

"To be sure, he deserves one. We'll go downtown this very afternoon and select it."

"Goody!" said James Mandeville, and in great spirits he carried his cakes out of doors, and was presently busily engaged in playing conductor on the doorstep, calling out in stentorian tones at intervals, "All on a board!"

Norah found the business of selecting valentines in company with a small boy, a lengthy one.

James Mandeville's taste was exacting. At first the comic ones caught his eye, and he was with difficulty induced to consider more worthy specimens of art; then he bestowed his favor upon an elaborate white satin heart, a combination sachet and valentine, and again had to be diverted. At length his selection was made,—a gilt and lace affair with a border of roses and the touching motto, "To my own true love."

On their way home they stopped in a large jewelry store where Norah had left her watch to be repaired, and while she waited she saw Wayland Leigh bending in an absorbed manner over a collection of fans,—delicate mother-of-pearl and lace trifles, as frail as they were pretty. What business had he with such expensive things? she wondered. It was quickly forgotten, however, in the difficulties involved in making headway past the show windows, James Mandeville wishing to exhaust the beauties of each one before moving on.

The afternoon was nearly over when, after leaving her companion at his home, she entered the shop, where Marion was busy folding and putting away. Norah stood before the table,



JAMES MANDEVILLE'S TASTE WAS EXACTING.



pulling off her gloves. Suddenly she stooped and picked up an envelope from the floor. "Did you get a letter from Dr. Baird?" she asked, as she read the address.

Marion's face flushed oddly. "No," she said, "it was just an enclosure."

"A valentine?" cried Norah; but Marion went on with her folding, and did not reply.

Norah walked to the window and looked out through the screen of plants at the Terrace and the faint rosy glow that lingered in the southwest. She guessed what it was her friend had received, and for a moment she was not quite happy. Then she asked herself inwardly, but sternly, "Are you a selfish beast, Norah Pennington?"

Presently Marion came behind her and put an arm around her. "You don't mind my not showing it to you, Norah. It was only a—"

Norah turned, and with a sudden motion stopped the word on her lips. "Child, what is friendship worth if one minds things—like that? I invited Miss Martin," she added.

Louise Martin was a fair, fresh-looking girl, who had come from a country town several years before, and after a course in a business college

had found a position as stenographer in a real estate office. Her gentle, refined manners had attracted Norah, who, persisting in the effort to make friends with her, had at length broken through the distant reserve with which she met all advances. The girl hesitated over the invitation, saying she did not often go anywhere; but Norah's friendly manner won the day, and promptly at half past six on Friday evening Susanna ushered her into the shop.

Norah met her and presented her to Marion. "And now you are to come upstairs to take off your things, for that always seems the sociable way to begin," she said.

Miss Martin looked about her in surprise. "When you said you kept a shop, I did not dream it was like this."

"We pride ourselves on not keeping an ordinary shop, but a most unpretentious one, as you see."

"And this is where you live?" Miss Martin exclaimed with a sigh of admiration, as she followed her guide into a very simple bedroom.

"We live all over the house. This is my room, however."

"It is the most beautiful place I ever saw," the girl said.

Remembering the dingy boarding-house, Norah understood. "It is all simple and inexpensive," she said. "Miss Carpenter and I pride ourselves on the large amount of comfort we have achieved for a small amount of money. You see we have matting on the floor, with a few rugs; as our landlord would not do anything to the walls, we had a frieze made of this big-flowered paper which cost next to nothing, and relieves the whiteness; the white iron beds and the dressing-tables were not expensive, nor the draperies, which are in our line, you know." While she talked Norah opened the door into the next room. "This is Miss Carpenter's," she said. "We are just alike, except that she is rose colored and I am blue."

There were some things Norah had not mentioned,—toilet articles such as Miss Martin had never seen outside of a show-case, and a silk dressing-gown of great daintiness that lay across a chair in Miss Carpenter's room.

"I was surprised when you said you kept a store,—you did not look like it; but if this is

the way you live — ” Miss Martin did not finish her sentence as she allowed Norah to take her hat.

That everything about the small domain impressed her, it was easy to see. The simple dinner served so deftly by Susanna, the appointments of the table, and by no means least, her two hostesses.

Before eight o'clock the basket makers arrived, with them Madelaine, who made a pretty pretence of being deeply grateful to Miss Pennington for allowing her to come. Miss Martin watched her with serious admiration in her eyes. Here was a girl little younger than herself, whose whole business in life was to be beautiful and engaging.

“ I have brought my prettiest valentine to show you,” Madelaine said. “ Isn’t it a dear ? ” and taking from its box a gauzy fan, she held it out for inspection.

Norah, who was nearest, took it. “ It is certainly pretty if not durable,” she remarked.

“ I hate durable things,” said its owner, with a shrug of her dainty shoulders. “ I know it cost a great deal, for I priced one like it.”

“ Madelaine ! ” expostulated her sister.

"Goosie, I don't mean since this came."

"And you don't know who sent it?" asked Charlotte.

"Think of sending a gift like this and not getting the credit for it," said Miss Sarah, viewing it from a practical standpoint.

"If I knew who sent it, mamma wouldn't let me keep it,—at least Alex wouldn't,—so of course I do not know."

It was impossible not to smile at her.

"You are a fraud, Madelaine," Miss Sarah said. "I wish I had the money some people spend on valentines."

"James Mandeville has a more practical mind than Miss Russell's unknown admirer; he delivered his valentines in person and demanded full credit," Marion observed.

Norah whispered to Alex, "Please be nice to my little girl," so Alex took a seat beside Miss Martin and showed her how to begin a basket.

"Miss Pennington says you are a stenographer. I am trying to learn, but I am hopelessly stupid. Do you think one can learn by one's self?"

"I learned at the Business College," answered

Miss Martin ; and looking Alex up and down she added, "but you do not have to do it, do you? I am glad I can support myself, but there are other ways, — like this, — only I never dreamed of it before. In a business office generally you are just part of a machine." Discovering that Miss Wilbur, too, was listening, she came to an embarrassed pause.

"What would you do if you were to become suddenly rich, Miss Sarah?" Madelaine asked, and everybody stopped to listen.

"Lose my mind, probably," was the answer.

"Riches make people so dreadfully commonplace," said Norah.

"What can be more commonplace than poverty?" Alex demanded.

"Well, I suppose both extremes are bad. It is, after all, the people who have neither poverty nor riches who have ideas and make something out of life."

"I could get heaps out of life if I were rich," Madelaine said.

"I still insist that rich people are to a considerable extent unoriginal and stupid. They associate with persons exactly like themselves,

do the same things, say the same things, eat the same things—”

“This is Miss Pennington’s hobby,” Marion remarked, smiling.

“What would you do if you were to become rich?” Miss Virginia asked her.

“I believe I should go on with the shop for the present,” was the reply.

“I think I should start a Settlement like the one you have told me about,” Alex said, turning to Norah. “But then,” she added, “I should have to learn a great deal first. You can’t do anything that amounts to anything without learning how.”

Miss Sarah had been meditating, now she spoke, “I think I’d try to give a good time to some persons who never have any fun, to whom life is only a grind.”

“There are so many of them,” added Miss Martin, timidly.

“I am afraid I have always been dreadfully selfish,” sighed Miss Virginia.

“Oh, no, Virginia, you aren’t that,” said Miss Sarah. “Like some of the rest of us, you may have lived in a small circle, but within its bounds

no one could accuse you of selfishness. Let's all promise to remember each other when we come into our fortunes," she added.

After they had gone,—Miss Martin lingering to say with shy earnestness, "I have had *such* a good time," and receiving in return a cordial invitation to consider herself a member of the basket society,—Norah joined Marion before the fire.

"Do you know, Wayland Leigh gave that fan to Madelaine," she said.

"Are you sure? It must have cost twenty-five or thirty dollars."

"I saw him looking at them the other day. I rather suspect his aunts have spoiled him."

## CHAPTER TWENTY-THIRD

### NEIGHBORS

LATE in February, after some weeks of unusually cold weather, an epidemic of grip developed. In the Terrace there were several victims, among the first the Leighs' cook; and when it came to filling her place, it was discovered that she was by no means the only member of that useful profession laid low. It was quite impossible to find a substitute. Miss Sarah was obliged to do her own cooking, with the assistance of a not very intelligent housemaid.

There were ten in her family now, and it was no light task; but she might have proved equal to it if she had not been overworking all winter. Her spare moments had been given to sewing and embroidering for the shop, she had indulged and petted her aunt and Wayland just as usual, besides attending to her housekeeping in the most painstaking fashion; and all the while like an ominous cloud hovering over her was the

doubt whether she would be able to make the two ends meet.

Perhaps she was extravagant with the table, but during her brother's lifetime they had lived in an easy, lavish way, and she knew no other.

It hurt Miss Sarah,—foolishly, but naturally,—that her nephew should have to pay board out of his small salary; and when one week he omitted to hand her the usual five dollars, she could not bear to ask him for it, although the lack of it put her to some inconvenience.

To Wayland things seemed moving on easily enough at home. He had become almost reconciled to the boarders, who made possible the more elaborate table; and it seemed to him quite impossible that so small a sum could make any great difference. He meant to pay it in time, but just now he was hard up. He had made the mistake of trying to be a society man, to compete with those whose incomes were many times as large as his own. In his heart he knew the purchase of that fan for Madelaine was a piece of inexcusable extravagance, but he had been too weak to resist.

Madelaine was most gracious in these days

to Winston Graham, a pampered youth whom Wayland had despised from his babyhood, and had tyrannized over at school. Now the tables were turned. Years had improved Winston, and any lack of brilliancy was more than atoned for by an ample fortune, in the management of which he was showing unexpected shrewdness.

For the moment that foolish fan had brought him a little pleasure. There could be no doubt Madelaine guessed the sender. Somebody was absurd, she said; if she were certain who sent it, she would return it,—and then she smiled bewitchingly over the gauzy trifle that had cost more than half a month's salary.

Miss Sarah was in some measure to blame. She should have taken her nephew into her confidence. Such things as taxes and unexpected plumber's bills did not present themselves to his mind, and when he presently found himself in debt, he went so far as to wonder if she might not be able to help him out, —temporarily, of course.

It was not till matters had grown desperate that he decided to do this. Wayland was not in the habit of getting into debt, and an insist-

ent tailor and florist made his life miserable. With masculine obtuseness he chose the most unpropitious moment. Miss Sarah, after a hard day, had dropped into an easy-chair for a little rest after dinner. Wayland had forgotten the absence of the cook, and in the lamplight his aunt looked placid and comfortable.

"Aunt Sarah," he began, "I am rather hard up just now—"

"Never mind, dear, I can get along, I think. You can pay me back sometime when it is convenient."

"Yes, I mean to,—but I have been a fool. I—I am going to turn over a new leaf,—not go out any more, and save up," Wayland stammered.

Usually to a remark of this kind his aunt would respond with consoling assurance that he was young and must have a little pleasure; but to-night she only said with a sigh it would perhaps be better; that when one was poor the only peaceful thing was to accept it.

"Then I suppose you couldn't lend me a little?" he faltered.

"Lend!" Miss Sarah sat up very straight. "Oh, Wayland, are you in debt?"

"Oh, well, if you can't it is all right; but you needn't jump all over a fellow."

"I do not understand what you mean by 'jumping all over you.' I certainly don't feel like such gymnastics. But I want you to tell me honestly the state of affairs."

The truth was hard to extract. Wayland was sullen, apologetic, and contrite by turns. At last it came out. He owed one hundred and fifty dollars.

"I am sorry." Miss Sarah sank back in her chair. "I fear you have been very foolish. To go in debt seems to me not quite honest. But I am glad you told me. I'll try to help you; and you'll promise, won't you, not to do this again?"

Somehow his aunt's low, controlled tone exasperated Wayland far more than if she had shown anger. "I guess if you knew what other fellows spend, you wouldn't think I was so awful. Of course I am sorry, and of course I don't mean to do it again," and he flung out of the room.

Two days later Miss Sarah alarmed the household at the breakfast table by fainting, something

she had never been known to do before. Simple restoratives proved of no avail, and Wayland rushed off to the nearest telephone to call a physician, almost running over Miss Pennington, who was starting for a morning walk.

"Could I be of any help?" she asked as he hurriedly explained.

"If you would," Wayland cried gratefully.

Norah entered upon a scene of confusion. Old Mrs. Leigh was frightened out of her senses, and no one seemed able to think what to do. Knowing something of illness and possessing a cool head and steady hand, Norah took command; and when the doctor arrived, Miss Sarah was beginning to recover consciousness.

She was ordered to bed at once; and when she ventured to expostulate feebly, Norah said: "Now, Miss Sarah, we can manage things for to-day. For once trust to your friends and don't worry. You will get well just so much sooner."

Miss Sarah looked up into the bright face that bent over her. "You are very good. Perhaps I will,—just for to-day."

"She is threatened with pneumonia; she must have a nurse," the doctor said, outside her door.

It was the beginning for Miss Sarah of a serious illness which in one way and another involved a number of her neighbors. Owing to the prevailing epidemic, it was at first impossible to get a satisfactory nurse, and Norah and Miss Virginia Wilbur offered their services. Miss Wilbur also lent her cook until Anne should be able to return, saying she and Charlotte could do very well with Martha.

In the shop Alex took Norah's place. Norah herself suggested it with some hesitation, thinking Mrs. Russell might object; but this lady, like many others, had somewhat modified her opinion of the shop. "You know," she explained on more than one occasion, "those young women are most interesting. Miss Carpenter, indeed, has a great deal of elegance. Alex, with her eccentric ideas, is delighted with them, and was so anxious to go I could not refuse."

Without the shop these would have been lonely days for Charlotte, with Aunt Virginia absent so much of the time, and her friend Helen one of the grip victims. Miss Carpenter had exerted a

peculiar fascination over Charlotte since the evening when she had come to her rescue. Others might prefer Miss Pennington; Charlotte never wavered in her admiration for the more quiet member of the firm. On her way to school each morning she invariably crossed the street that she might pass the shop, and perhaps receive a smile from Marion.

This new enthusiasm overshadowed all former ones, and Miss Carpenter seemed by no means indifferent to the little girl's adoration, making her welcome to run in and out at all times. After hours, or when business was dull, Charlotte would often talk to her about the Landors, and their Philadelphia home, and Miss Carpenter seemed quite ready to listen; but Charlotte's curiosity about her cousin who lived across the street, was never satisfied.

Miss Sarah, to whom indirectly this cementing of the ties between the shop and its neighbors was due, called Norah to her bedside on the first day of her illness, and confided to her a certain railroad bond.

"I am afraid it will be some time before I am able to attend to this myself," she said, "so

I am going to ask you to see if you can sell it for me. I went yesterday to see about it, but they told me to hold on to it for a while, if possible, and I thought I could perhaps wait; but now I want the money. It will have to go at whatever price it will bring. It is too bad to ask you,—you are so good."

Norah assured her she would not mind in the least, and leaving the patient in Miss Virginia's hands she walked thoughtfully toward home. She happened to know that there was considerable interest felt at present in the fluctuation of these bonds, for she sometimes read the market news to Mr. Goodman, and he had a few days before spoken of buying some. Was there any possible way by which she could sell Miss Sarah's bond without sacrificing it?

At the corner she met Mr. Goodman, and at sight of him a sudden idea took possession of her.

"Mr. Goodman, can you tell me how G. W. & S. bonds are selling to-day?" she asked.

"Seventy-two they are asking to-day. A good thing if you want to buy. They are bound to go up," was the old gentleman's reply.

"Could you come in and let me ask you a few questions?" said Norah.

Mr. Goodman never objected to talking stocks and bonds, and therefore assented affably.

To the very evident amusement of Alex and Marion, Norah conducted her companion through the shop into the next room, flashing a mischievous glance over her shoulder as she pushed the door to. Giving the old man a chair, she seated herself opposite him; and leaning forward with her folded arms on the table, she told him of Miss Sarah's illness and her need of money. "Now," she concluded, "she has one of those bonds, and I want to sell it for a thousand dollars."

"My dear young lady, you can't do the impossible. Keep it six months and it may be at par."

"But she can't wait. She must have the money,—at least she thinks so; and she is too ill to be argued with. I want to make her mind easy. Why couldn't—somebody—give a thousand dollars for it?" Norah's heart beat quickly at her own daring. What would be lost?"

"Why doesn't somebody give her three hundred dollars, you mean?"

"No, that is not at all what I mean," urged Norah. "I think you said you were buying to sell? Now, if that bond is worth a thousand dollars six months from now, what would—anybody lose who gave that for it now? Only the interest on not quite three hundred dollars. That is, of course, taking for granted he expected to sell."

"Upon my word!" exclaimed Mr. Goodman. "What is she talking about? I didn't say they would be at par in six months."

"Well, say a year, then. If you'll buy the bond, I'll pay the interest. I'll give you my note," Norah said, laughing.

"It is the most astonishing proposition I ever heard," growled the old man.

"It is to help a neighbor out, and that is the best thing in life, particularly any one so brave and bright as Miss Sarah. She would never let us do it if she guessed, but I can tell her they are going up steadily. I think I can manage it." Norah beamed across the table.

Whether she had won or not was difficult to tell, for Mr. Goodman rose suddenly, buttoned up his coat, and saying he would see her the

next day, strode off without so much as good evening.

"Norah, what made you do it?" Marion exclaimed when she heard the story. "Surely, it could have been arranged."

"I don't know. It popped into my head when I saw him. It won't do any harm to get some of his rusty dollars into circulation. I almost believe he will do it."

And she was right. Mr. Goodman gave her a check for a thousand dollars, and, moreover, suggested that if Miss Sarah did not need the whole amount at present, he could invest several hundred of it advantageously. And this was the kindest thing Giant Despair had done for many a year. As for Norah's scheme for paying him interest, he only laughed at that.

Poor Miss Sarah was too ill to understand more than that the bond was sold. She was feverishly anxious till she could put the money for his debts into Wayland's hands. After this she grew rapidly worse, and the outcome began to seem doubtful.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-FOURTH

### WAYLAND

WAYLAND blamed himself bitterly. He could not forget the touch of those burning fingers pressing the money into his hand. He tried to refuse it, but his aunt whispered: "Take it, dear. It is all right. I shall not be happy till you do." After this he had been sent from the room and not allowed to see her again.

Old Mrs. Leigh, bemoaning Sarah's hard lot and accusing herself of selfishness, unconsciously enlightened him as to the true state of affairs. Wayland sincerely loved his aunt,—the only mother he had ever known,—and he realized with shame how unworthy had been his attitude toward her of late. While she had been struggling to make a home for him and her old aunt, thinking and spending for him till there was nothing left for herself, he, absorbed in his own affairs, had been disdainful and critical, fretted

by her habit of laughing at things, annoyed by her style of dress.

And this money. He guessed where it came from. She must have sold a bond left to her by a friend some years ago, which she called her rainy-day legacy. He fiercely promised himself he would pay it back.

But in the terrible fear that she would not recover, this thought ceased to console him. What if he should never have the opportunity to tell her how sorry he was, how ashamed? The doctor looked very grave, the nurse and Miss Virginia shook their heads and said, "No better." Norah was the only who one gave him any encouragement. She bade him not give up yet, and devised errands to distract him from his misery, and make him feel that he was of some use. He hung upon her words with such an appealing face her heart was touched, for she guessed that remorse mingled with his sorrow.

There came a dreadful day when even she had no hopeful word to say; when, hurrying home at the earliest moment, he found the house hushed in a terrible suspense.

Miss Virginia sat with Mrs. Leigh, and they

talked of Miss Sarah, and wiped the tears from their eyes as if she were already dead. Wayland could not endure it.

In his longing for comfort he thought of Madelaine. Surely, she would be kind to him now. She was tender-hearted and sympathetic; just the touch of her pretty hand would help him. He had not seen her for more than a week.

Miss Madelaine was dressing to go out, but would see him for a moment if he cared to wait, the servant said; and presently as he strode back and forth, too restless to sit down, she floated in, lovely and gracious as ever.

"I am going to dinner at the Mays'. I am sorry I can't see you for more than a minute. How is Miss Sarah to-night?"

"No better — worse," Wayland answered brokenly, holding fast the hand she offered him. Gently Madelaine drew it away, and began to put on her glove.

"I am *so* sorry," she said, "but you mustn't despair. I am sure she is going to get well."

Upon Wayland's sensitive ear the words fell with a hollowness almost unbearable. "She does not care at all," he told himself.

This was perhaps a little unjust to Madelaine. She was very full at that moment of the joy of living; she knew nothing by experience, of illness and death. She was sorry for Wayland, but the thought of the evening's pleasure was not for an instant dimmed by it.

Wayland went blindly home again, conscious of nothing but the pain in his heart. At the door Norah met him with a note which she asked him to take to Miss Carpenter. "The doctor thinks there will be no change for some hours," she told him.

He sat staring into the fire in the same blind way when Marion entered the room.

"There is no haste about the answer. Won't you stay with me for a while?" she said. "I am alone, and I know you must be feeling the strain of suspense."

Norah's note had said: "Do keep the poor boy and comfort him if you can. He does nothing but wander in and out."

"Thank you, I think I must go back," he answered, lingering aimlessly however.

Marion brought him a cup of after-dinner coffee, and he submitted and drank it, although he

felt it must choke him ; and when he had swallowed it, he was the better for it.

Marion did not make the mistake of trying to cheer him in the face of this terrible anxiety, but in every possible way she showed her sympathy. She spoke of his aunt, of her brightness and kindness, of her evident attachment for him ; and poor Wayland, longing to pour out his unhappiness to some one, forgot she was almost a stranger and came out with his confession. His foolishness and extravagance, his carelessness of his aunt's comfort. It was very boyish and perfectly sincere. Madelaine was not mentioned by name, but the wound showed plainly, and Marion guessed what he did not tell.

"And now I shall never have a chance to show her how sorry I am," he groaned, hiding his face.

"Don't say that. There is still some room for hope that you may have another opportunity ; and even if you do not, you can yet make of yourself what she would wish," Marion said ; adding, "If you will let me speak to you as if you were my younger brother, I should say that all the trouble has come from a natural but selfish determination to have what, after all, was not meant for you. I

think I understand; and although you may not believe me, I am sure it could never have made you happy if you had been able to obtain it."

"If you mean Madelaine," Wayland said, lifting his head, "that is all over."

Afterward he could look back on that evening and feel that out of his grief he had won a friend who might never have been his under other circumstances. At the moment he was conscious only of the new courage and determination that inspired him, when after the long talk he said good night.

With the morning new hope came. There was a chance for recovery; and this grew, until at length Miss Sarah began slowly to climb the hill toward health again.

It was some time before Wayland could pour out to her his repentance, and then his aunt would not let him say half he wanted to say.

"Why, child," she exclaimed, patting the head bowed on the arm of her chair, "you have done nothing to call forth all this. You have been thoughtless, as most young persons are; but I suspect it is my fault. I spoiled you. I did so want you to have what you wanted, always. I

suppose it is foolish, but it is the way we feel about the children we bring up."

"You shall have that bond back, or one just as good, Aunt Sarah," he assured her; and there was something in his face which showed he meant it.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-FIFTH

### THE PRICE OF A BOND

"**M**R. GOODMAN, I want to understand about that bond Miss Pennington sold for me. I have been reading the papers, and I don't see how it could have brought a thousand dollars when they are only quoted at eighty-something." Miss Sarah was still white and weak, but she spoke with a touch of her old energy.

Ever since she had been able to think connectedly, the matter had puzzled her. Norah, when appealed to, was innocence itself.

"I am sure he did not lose anything, Miss Sarah," she said. "I offered it to him because I happened to know he had already bought some."

So now she had summoned Giant Despair himself, happening to see from her window his clumsy figure coming up the street.

"I am glad to see you better, Miss Sarah," he said, appearing rather ill at ease as he seated himself ponderously in a wicker chair.

"Goodness! I hope it won't give way with him," thought Miss Sarah; then aloud she repeated her question, adding, "I have no confidence whatever in Miss Pennington."

Giant Despair squinted at her with his best eye, as if to see just what she meant.

"My own opinion," Miss Sarah continued, "has always been that she is a witch; but even then I don't understand it."

Mr. Goodman smiled grimly and slapped his gloves across his knee. "Probably you don't know much about the ways of witches," he remarked.

"I ought to know something. I can't imagine what I should have done without Norah. Everybody was kind,—more than kind,—but she knew how to take hold and manage things. I—" she hesitated a moment before she added, "and we didn't want them in the neighborhood!"

"I guess you are right about the witch business," agreed the old man.

"But the bond," urged Miss Sarah.

"Well, there is nothing to be said about the bond, so far as I know. As a general thing women don't know much about business, but Miss

Norah has taught me a thing or two. I haven't lost anything on your bond, Miss Sarah, and I expect to make before I get through."

"And you are sure that she—"

"She didn't lose anything, either,—if that is what you mean. That bond was worth to me what I paid for it, and that is all I can say on the subject, unless—" Giant Despair hesitated. "Years ago your brother saved me a good deal of money at one time and another. He was a good man. I have sometimes wished I had taken his advice. If you aren't satisfied, just remember that."

There had been a time when Miss Sarah's brother, Wayland's father, had managed Mr. Goodman's law business; but the relations had come to a sudden end. The only explanation Mr. Leigh had ever made to his sister was that he did not care for certain of the drug company's methods.

"Then all I can do is to thank you most warmly," she said as he rose.

"If I have helped you, Miss Sarah, I am glad. As I say, I have not lost anything, and I am a useless old codger, anyhow."

Miss Sarah wiped some tears away; she was far from strong yet. "I think it was a conspiracy between you and Miss Pennington, but I'll have to let it go."

"I am in good company, at any rate," said Giant Despair.

James Mandeville waited for Mr. Goodman at the gate, and the two walked away together, hand in hand, the little boy taking great pains to point out all obstacles in the path, chattering ceaselessly, his radiant face lifted constantly to the rugged one so far above him. Miss Sarah watched them and smiled.

As for Mr. Goodman, he felt a strange sense of exhilaration,—so much so, that when they met an organ-grinder and a monkey (spring being now at hand) he contributed a dime instead of the usual five-cent piece.

A week later he went to a hospital to have his eye operated on, and during the weeks of helplessness that followed he was the recipient of an amount of attention that greatly surprised him.

The hospital was only a few blocks away from the Terrace, and hardly a day passed without a

visit from some of his neighbors. Marion, Norah, and Alexina took turns in reading to him; and James Mandeville came whenever he could induce any one to bring him.

In the same corridor was a man recovering from a stroke of paralysis, who, rolling himself back and forth in his chair, occasionally encountered Mr. Goodman and exchanged a few words.

"I notice you have a great many friends," the stranger remarked one day.

"I?" exclaimed Giant Despair, who looked fiercer than ever with one eye bandaged. "Well, I suppose I have," he admitted, and became lost in thought. Eight months ago probably not a soul would have done more than leave a card, unless it had been a member of the firm. How had it come about? Undoubtedly the shopkeepers had something to do with it. They had showed themselves friendly. Then he thought of that bond. Suppose he had refused Norah? Ah, he had told Miss Sarah the strict truth when he said he had not lost anything in that transaction. He really felt the impulse to do another kindness to somebody, but not being in practice, nothing suggested itself.

An opportunity came, however. One Sunday afternoon James Mandeville brought his father with him to see Mr. Goodman. The child's joyous air of proprietorship was pretty to see.

"Here's my father," he announced. "Isn't you glad he's come home?" Then, as the two men shook hands, he asked, leaning confidingly against his old friend, "Does your eye hurt, still yet?"

The conversation turned naturally to business, and after a time Mr. Goodman suddenly said, "Norton, it has just occurred to me— We are making some changes this spring, and we need an experienced man to look after the city trade. How would you like the place?"

Mr. Norton's careworn, boyish face flushed and brightened. "It would mean a great deal to me now, Mr. Goodman. My wife will be at home soon; I was dreading the thought of having to leave. Thank you very much."

"You needn't thank me. I am considering my own interest," the old man replied, with an affability that astounded himself.

"I rather think Jenks is expecting the

place, but he isn't married; he can wait," he added.

"Miss Norah, does you reckon old Marse Goodman's gittin' religion?" asked Mammy Belle one day. "Looks like he's mighty soft-hearted."

## CHAPTER TWENTY-SIXTH

### NORAH'S ARK

ALEXINA said the shop, like a little leaven, was leavening the whole neighborhood, and truly it seemed so. To her those two weeks of association with Marion had been a joy. In the congenial surroundings of the shop she found it easy to live in to-day, leaving the future to unfold as it would. Her shorthand book lay unopened; she began to feel the truth of Marion's assurance, "Your forte is dainty, feminine things, Alex, in spite of your disdain for them."

In their leisure moments they had built many castles concerned with the future of the shop, one of these being a millinery department of which Alex was to have charge.

Indeed, the two weeks of Miss Sarah's illness saw the beginning of many things. Between Miss Virginia and Norah Pennington a strong friendship grew up.

"Miss Virginia is such a dear!" Norah said.

"I adore her stilted little expressions, such as 'busy with my needle or pen,' instead of sewing or writing, and with it all she is at heart a child."

"That is the point of contact between you," Marion answered, smiling.

Miss Virginia was like one who had thrown off a yoke, yet she hardly understood her own light-heartedness. It was quite true that she had never outgrown her girlhood. It was only overlaid by grown-up manners, and unconsciously she was beginning to let the burden of convention slip from her shoulders and to enjoy herself as her nature prompted.

Charlotte was an hourly pleasure. Miss Virginia enjoyed looking after her wardrobe as in the past she had enjoyed dressing her dolls. She listened to the schoolgirl experiences poured into her ear, with genuine interest. They were like two children together; but Miss Virginia's sweetness and sincerity, her delicate refinement, could not but have their influence on her impetuous little niece.

One broadening influence came from those Friday evenings in the shop, with their basket making and pleasant talk. Miss Virginia had

been accustomed to accept things as they were. When in her very infrequent visits to business offices she had encountered young women acting as bookkeepers and stenographers, she had looked upon them as a class apart. Not that she felt consciously superior, or anything but kindly, but simply that her life and theirs did not touch. She was actually surprised to find Norah's friend Louise Martin so much like other girls, and when Norah described the hall bedroom in the gloomy boarding-house, which was her only home, Miss Virginia began to wish and then to wonder if she could not do something to brighten a life that seemed so dreary.

Another addition to the Friday gatherings was a Miss Jackson, a fellow-boarder of Miss Martin's, a public school teacher and an ambitious, high-spirited girl.

Toward these two Miss Virginia began to show a timid friendliness so plainly sincere it was irresistible. She found them much more interesting than many of the people who belonged to her own sphere, and whom she was accustomed to call friends. The end of it was, she asked them to tea with Alex and the shop-

keepers,—a tremendous departure, a step taken with fear and trembling. But when it was over, she found herself looking back on it as one of the happiest occasions of her life.

And now the Friday evenings at the shop began to be enlarged in their scope. It came about quite naturally. Norah, the sunny-hearted, could not breathe without attracting friends; and while the basket making still went on, and Miss Sarah and Miss Virginia brought their embroidery, others dropped in for the pleasant talk.

Alex induced her grandfather to go with her on one occasion, and the judge was clearly both bewildered and charmed. He renewed his acquaintance with Norah, of whom he had not ceased to speak in admiration, and was greatly impressed by Marion's graceful bearing.

Madelaine, who enjoyed doing unexpected things, appeared upon the scene this same night with Winston Graham in tow. This gentleman's astonishment was only exceeded by his willingness to follow Madelaine anywhere. He professed some interest in baskets, whereupon Marion gave him a seat beside Miss Martin.

"‘The rich and the poor meet together, the Lord is the maker of them all,’" Miss Sarah quoted to Miss Virginia.

"What do you call this place, Miss Pennington? It isn't really a shop—you don't sell things?" asked Mr. Graham, when, a little later, Norah came to the rescue.

"Why, of course we do. How else could we make a living? And it has several names," she replied. "Has Alex told you the latest," turning to Judge Russell. "She saw Mammy Belle on the corner one morning, gazing over here with all her eyes. 'It shorely do look like a *Norah's Ark*, Miss Alex,' she said. And really there is no doubt about its resembling an ark although we had none of us thought of it; and while I can't claim exclusive proprietorship, I accept the honor of having it named for me. What do you think of it?"

The old gentleman glanced about him. "It is not nearly poetic enough, my dear," he said.

Norah laughed at this gallant speech. "You see," she went on, "we are simply reviving a cosey old custom of living over the shop, which should interest you as a lover of old things."

"And also of young things—if you will pardon the expression," said the judge, smiling.

"Why, grandfather," cried Alex, "I shall be afraid to bring you again."

"I expect to wake some morning and find the shop has disappeared, leaving no trace of itself," Miss Sarah remarked.

"I trust not," exclaimed Norah. "Where would we be?"

"An enchanted prince would have carried you off," laughed Charlotte.

"Two princes," suggested Miss Virginia.

A sudden gravity fell on Norah, so noticeable that Miss Sarah said, as she turned away, "She seems not to like the idea of the prince."

The days grew long, the air soft and warm; the Terrace gardens bloomed again and the rich foliage of summer succeeded the delicate lace-work of spring. The Russell house was again a Palace Beautiful in its mantle of vines, and the judge sat on the rustic bench beneath the Ginkgo tree, his hands on his stick and a far-away look in his eyes.

Every moment that could be spared from the

shop found Marion and Norah off to the country, to return laden with fragrant trophies. The delicate look had gone from Marion's face, and the disfiguring glasses were rarely seen.

One evening in May an unexpected visitor appeared in the shop. A tall, wiry man, past middle age, with a keen, kindly face.

"Why, Dr. Baird!" cried Norah, "I was just wishing for you."

"You were?" he said, shaking hands. "Anything wrong with my patient?"

"Here she is, to speak for herself," said Marion, entering from the next room.

The physician looked at her long and intently. "I give up," he said at length. "It has worked. You are all right, and"—turning to Norah—"I suppose you think you are very clever, miss. Your wild-goose scheme has been a success."

"You shall not call it names, for it has been the happiest winter of my life," said Marion.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVENTH

### AN ANNIVERSARY

"**M**ISS MARION, are you here? I am so glad to see you! I have something to show you. Where is Miss Norah?" Charlotte punctuated her breathless remarks with an ardent embrace.

"Why, Charlotte, how rosy you look, and I believe you have grown two inches!" Miss Carpenter had risen to meet her, and now took the brown face in both her hands and smiled into the blue eyes. "It is good to see you again. When did you get home?"

"Early this morning; and now Aunt Virginia has everything out of our trunks—you would think there had been ten instead of two—and she and Martha are putting away, so I ran," Charlotte answered gayly.

It was September again. The shop, which had been closed for a month while its proprietors took a holiday, had reopened, but the days were still

warm, and little was doing. This afternoon, with its shaded windows and its autumn decorations of goldenrod and asters, it looked cool and inviting.

Marion, who had been reading when Charlotte entered, laid her book on the table and motioned to a place beside her in the window-seat. "What have you to show me?" she asked.

"You'll never guess, so I shall have to tell you. And, oh, Miss Marion, I want to ask you something, but I'm afraid."

"Am I so very formidable? I can't imagine what it can be. I'll promise not to answer if I do not like the question."

"It isn't that," cried Charlotte. "It is nothing I want you to tell me, it is something I want you to do."

"Then I am more puzzled than ever. Do let me see what you have. Is it a book?"

For answer Charlotte slipped the outer cover from a small green and gold volume and put it into Marion's hand, drawing near and leaning against her shoulder as she did so. "It is Cousin Frank's book," she said. "It came while he was with us at Rocky Point. He gave me the very first. Isn't it a dear?"

Marion turned the leaves in silence. "Love's Reason, and Other Poems," the title-page said. She turned another leaf, "To One Far Away," was the dedication. She paused here for a moment, then went on turning the pages.

"It is a very pretty little book," she said, in a tone that seemed to Charlotte less interested than the occasion called for.

"I thought you'd like it, because I have talked to you so much about Cousin Frank. And, oh, Miss Marion, it is about Miss Carpenter I want to ask you." Charlotte's head was against Marion's arm, and she did not lift her eyes.

"It was one evening when Cousin Frank and I were sitting on the sand in the moonlight. Some man — I forget his name, but at any rate he is a great critic — stopped us as we were leaving the hotel, to say something very nice about the poems ; and I asked Cousin Frank if he were not pleased. He said he was glad, of course, to have it liked, and he valued this man's judgment; but that after all it was for the opinion of just one person he cared the most. I was certain it must be Miss Carpenter, because of the dedication,— that couldn't mean any one else ; so I said I knew she must

like it. He looked at me in such a funny way and asked what I meant. So I told him what I had guessed, and he did not seem to mind.

"I asked if he had sent her a book, but he said he did not know where she was, and the only person who did know was away, too. Then for a long time he did not say anything; but after a while I slipped my hand in his, and told him I knew she must care,—she couldn't help it,—although I hadn't any idea why she had gone away without letting him know where she was.

"He said if he were sure she did not care at all, he would give it up, for that would be the only manly thing; but until he was sure, he must hope. It was then I began to wonder if you knew where she was, Miss Marion. If you do, couldn't you tell her how much he cares? I don't see why she went away; but Cousin Frank said she had a reason, although he didn't think it was a good one. Could you tell her, Miss Marion?"

"Did you ever say anything to Mr. Landor about the shop or—" Marion left the question unfinished.

"Yes, that very evening I told him I was certain my Miss Carpenter was lovelier than his." Charlotte squeezed the hand she held. "He smiled, and asked a great many questions. But could you tell her?" Charlotte was nothing if not persistent.

This Miss Carpenter, of whom she had grown so fond, was a quiet person, not given to demonstration of any sort, but Charlotte suddenly felt herself drawn into a close embrace, while a very gentle voice said in her ear: "Charlotte, you may tell him I *know* she cares. I think she was right to go away—she had a reason, but—"

"What is going on here?" broke in Norah's gay tones. "Why, Charlotte, how are you? You two look as if you had been in mischief."

A moment later who should walk in but Mrs. Leigh, looking like an old ivory portrait, her apple-blossom face framed in silver puffs and white frills. "Are you at home, and ready to show your pretty things? Upon my word, I am glad to see the shop open again. We have missed you."

"Thank you, dear Mrs. Leigh; we are glad to be back again," said Norah, greeting her

cordially, while Marion pushed forward a chair and Charlotte brought a cushion.

Mrs. Leigh adored to be waited upon; she beamed graciously on the three. "Thank you, my dears. This is a charming place, and I must say I didn't expect to see you here again."

"Why not? We had no idea of not coming back," Marion said.

"Oh, I have never believed it would last," Mrs. Leigh's bright eyes twinkled. "You are too—well, there is a mystery about you, you know."

"I didn't know. How interesting!" exclaimed Norah, laughing.

"Well, I suppose there is no use in talking about it. You won't tell me. Charlotte, when is your Aunt Caroline expected?"

They were looking for her in a day or two, Charlotte replied, putting on her hat as she spoke. She did not care to stay and listen to Mrs. Leigh just now.

Marion caught her hand. "May I have the little book for a while?" she whispered.

"I have a piece of news for you," announced the old lady, as Charlotte disappeared.

"Madelaine Russell is engaged to Winston Graham. It is to be announced this week. It will be a relief to her mother to have her well married, and I expect she is getting what she wants."

"I think it is an excellent match," remarked Norah. "Winston is not a bad fellow, and Madelaine couldn't be happy without money. Why, if there isn't Mammy Belle!" she added, looking up.

In the doorway stood that dusky personage, arrayed not in her usual starched calico and white apron, but in her Sunday dress of black, with floating crêpe veil.

"Howdy, Miss Norah; howdy, Miss Marion. I des come to see how you all was gettin' on. I'se tolable, thank you, ma'am. Yes'm, James Mandeville's gone wid his mamma to see his grandpaw, and Marse Tom's the onliest one lef'."

"Sit down and rest," said Marion. "Mrs. Leigh, you know Aunt Belle, don't you?"

"Is that Belle Campbell? Of course I do. I remember you, Belle, when you lived at the Graingers'."

"Yes'm, Miss Sally, I 'members you. Looks

like you's mighty peart yit." Mammy Belle smoothed the front of her skirt and then folded her black gloved hands in her lap.

"Oh, I'm not good for much any more," answered Mrs. Leigh. "But tell me, Belle, what made you leave the Graingers? I thought you were a fixture there."

"Yes'm, I reckon I'd be living there yit, if 'twarn't fur ole Marse Andrew. He done sassed me too much, Miss Sally. Aunt Judy she say, 'Better stay whar de pot biles hardes', Belle,' but I couldn't stan' ole Marse Andrew."

"I had forgotten about Aunt Judy. Is she still living?" asked Mrs. Leigh.

"Yes, ma'am, she's livin', but she is mighty porely."

"Isn't she very old?"

"Yes'm, Miss Sally, Aunt Judy's tolable ole. Look like she don' know fur shore how ole she is. You knows Marse Andrew, Miss Sally? Well, Aunt Judy say she war a little gal runnin' round when Marse Andrew was bawn, an' dey tuk her into de house dat day to wait on ole Miss, Marse Andrew's grandmaw, and it was corn-shuckin' time; so if you knows how ole

Marse Andrew is, you knows how ole Aunt Judy is."

These interesting reminiscences were interrupted by Alex and her grandfather, who stopped at the door to welcome their neighbors back, as the judge explained, his fine old face beaming with friendliness.

"What do you think Caroline is going to say when she finds us all friends of the shop, Judge?" asked plain-spoken Mrs. Leigh.

"I am of the opinion that even Mrs. Millard will be unable to hold out against it very long. You know she hasn't had our opportunities," was the reply. "I have some new books to show you,—or some old ones, rather,—Miss Norah," the judge added.

Norah had been sitting alone in the south window for some time when Marion joined her.

"Where have you been? and what is that small green book you are carrying about?" Norah asked.

Marion put it into her hand; as she did so, a paper fluttered out and fell to the floor. Stooping for it, Norah's quick eyes read involuntarily,

"I love her whether she love me or no,"  
and something told her it was the valentine of  
last winter.

Marion's fingers closed over it. "Charlotte  
brought me the book," she explained; "but don't  
try to read by this light."

"I shall not read much; I want to see what  
it is."

There was silence for some minutes; then  
Norah put an arm around her friend. "Marion,  
I have been thinking I'd ask Alex to be my  
partner when you go." Try as she would, there  
was a little break on that last word.

"Why, Norah!"

"No, let me finish. You know a shop is not  
the station to which you are called, dear. I see  
clearly that the fairy prince is coming, and there  
is no reason why he should not." Norah pressed  
her cheek against Marion's. "Do you realize  
this is the anniversary of our coming here?"

"It seems to me you are very ready to give  
me up," said Marion.

"Oh, Marion!"

"Forgive me, dear, I know you aren't. That  
was not fair. But I don't know — I can't talk

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about it now. I feel drawn two ways, and I am jealous of Alex when I think of her in my place."

"I don't want you to be altogether glad, but I am proud of what the shop has done for you. And of course I have known all along it could not last. We have had a good time, haven't we?"

"And it is not over yet," Marion said, pressing the hand she held. "There is one thing that perplexes me. The time has come for explanations, I suppose, and the situation seems a little melodramatic and silly."

"Don't think about it, then. It will work out of itself. Does it not seem strange when you look back to that evening when we first thought of the shop, that it has really been tried and proved a success?"

"Indeed, it does. How miserable I was, and determined not to go abroad, as Dr. Baird wished, but to stay there at home. Then you declined to stay with me, Norah; and when I was in despair you proposed the wild scheme of keeping a shop. I was interested at first, but you don't know how often I would have given up if it

had not been for the fear of losing you. And now, Norah, I wouldn't give a hundred thousand dollars for the experience."

"That is a good deal of money. I ought to be very triumphant that my plan worked so well." Norah's tone was sad, however.

After the lamps were lighted Marion became absorbed in the little book, bending over it with a pretty glow in her face. From the other side of the table Norah watched her. After a while she rose and took down the rainbow bag and drew out a card.

"If I make dark my countenance,  
I shut my life to happier chance."

She pondered it. "That is true," she told herself, "and there is no end to the beautiful things that may happen if only one is ready for them."

## CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHTH

### WHAT IT MEANT

CHARLOTTE walked slowly home. She wondered what Miss Marion meant. "Tell him I know she cares." Charlotte had often noticed that Miss Carpenter seemed not to be deeply interested in her Philadelphia cousin, and now suddenly she turned around and was apparently intimately acquainted with her feelings. It was a puzzle.

She sat down in one of the porch chairs to think it over, making a pleasant picture in her white dress, with the feathery clematis for a background, her blue eyes serious and thoughtful, as she rocked softly back and forth. The old self-assertion which a year ago had shown itself in attitude and speech had become softened now until it was no more than a gentle independence.

She had toned down, Cousin Francis told her, with evident approval. In spite of its tempestuous beginning, the year in the Terrace had in

great measure resulted as her guardian hoped it would.

Aunt Virginia's sweet refinement, Alexina's earnestness, Madelaine's grace,— all these had had their influence; but most potent had been her admiration — almost adoration — for Miss Carpenter. Charlotte had made pleasant friends in school, but after all her happiest hours had been spent in the Terrace, where a year ago life had promised to be so dull.

Aunt Virginia joined her presently, dropping into a chair with a sigh of satisfaction. "It is good to be at home again, and Martha and I have everything put away," she said. "Where have you been?"

"Over to see Miss Marion, but Mrs. Leigh came in and I didn't care to stay."

Miss Virginia rocked briskly for some minutes, then she remarked, "There was something in your Aunt Caroline's last letter I did not understand." Taking it from the envelope she unfolded it and glanced down the page. "Here it is. 'I infer from certain hints you have dropped at different times that you have not taken my advice in regard to the shop—' I

didn't hint, I only said — ” Miss Virginia hesitated. She did not recall just what she had said, but she knew she had by no means revealed the true extent of her intimacy with the shopkeepers. She went on with the letter. “ ‘I have lately received some first-hand information concerning these young women, who seem to have fulfilled my prophecy that they would lose no opportunity to ingratiate themselves. I fear you have been too credulous, my dear Virginia, but I will not enter into the matter further till I see you.’ ”

“ I wonder what she means by ‘first-hand information’ ? ” said Miss Virginia. “ I know Caroline will never feel as the rest of us do, but she can’t know anything against them.”

“ No, indeed,” Charlotte cried. “ There isn’t anything about Miss Marion, or Miss Norah either, that is not lovely.”

The thought of Marion’s caress returned, and with it the question whether she should tell Cousin Frank or not; for it occurred to her he might think her officious to have spoken of the matter to a stranger. If — Charlotte became lost in thought again.

A good many miles to the northward two gentlemen were dining together at the very hour when Miss Virginia and Charlotte sat on the porch and watched the sunset without thinking of it.

"You have great reason to be pleased with the reviews of your book, Frank," the elder man remarked, gratified affection in the grave smile with which his gaze rested on his son.

"Yes, for the most part the critics are kind," Francis Landor replied, drawing hieroglyphics in an absent manner on the cloth with the handle of his spoon.

"But one thing is lacking," thought the father, his glance still resting on the bent head. "The boy must come to something with such a head," he had often said in his childhood; and now the belief was likely to be justified. The face before him was showing the strong, serious lines of maturity, yet he almost regretted the lost boyishness as he noted them.

Suddenly Frank looked up. "I am thinking of going away for a week or so," he announced.

A smile hovered about his father's lips. "May I ask in what direction?—To see Charlotte?"

Their eyes met. "Yes, to see Charlotte," Francis answered.

"When do you go?"

"Sometime to-morrow."

"I wish you good luck, my son."

"So he, too, has guessed," thought Frank.

When he was alone, he took out a letter which bore evidence of more than one reading. Its date showed it to be a year old.

"I am going away," the letter said, "to be gone a long time,—at least a year. By then my fate ought to be decided. I am trying to hope, as Dr. Baird assures me I may, trying to live entirely in the present. It is not easy, but how can I make any plans for the future when a possible life of helplessness lies before me? You are generous, and I know you will forgive if this causes you pain. Forget—everything but that I am always your friend,

"MARION CARPENTER.

"I have told no one where I am going, as it seems best to make as complete a break as possible with my life here. Dr. Baird, of course, knows."

## CHAPTER TWENTY-NINTH

### A LETTER

"**R**EALLY, Mrs. Millard, you have treated us very shabbily. It is nearly a year since you left us."

"Ten months, Judge Russell. You are very kind to say you have missed me. I had no thought of staying so long when I left, and I am delighted to be at home again." Mrs. Millard stood in the drawing-room, as composed and elegant as if she had not arrived from a three days' railway journey only a few hours before.

It was a summer-like evening, doors and windows were open, and one after another of the neighbors had dropped in, until Charlotte was reminded of the evening a year ago when the shop was under discussion. She felt a little shy in Aunt Caroline's presence, although that lady was graciousness itself; and Wayland Leigh, who came in with his aunt, joined her in the corner by

the library door and wanted to know what made her so quiet.

"Quite a party, isn't it?" he said; adding, "but where are Miss Marion and Miss Norah?" Like Charlotte, Wayland always put Marion first.

"I don't believe Aunt Caroline would want them," she replied, smiling.

"To be sure, when she went away we didn't know them."

That others were also thinking of the shop was evident, for Miss Sarah was now heard remarking, "You left us defenceless, Caroline, and we surrendered soon after your departure."

"Yes, the shop has become a neighborhood institution," Judge Russell added.

"I am more than surprised to hear *you* say so, Judge Russell."

"But Mr. Goodman is the most remarkable convert, Mrs. Millard," said Alex. "Just ask him his opinion of the shop."

"I do not wish to criticise, this first evening at home," Mrs. Millard began graciously; "but as I have been telling Virginia, I cannot understand the fascination these persons seem to have exercised over you."

"But you know they are really charming young women," ventured Mrs. Russell. "I objected to the shop as decidedly as any one until I found out about them. Their popularity is not confined to this neighborhood, and of course you know they are well connected."

"It is about that I wish to speak," interposed Mrs. Millard. "As you may have heard, Miss Unadilla Carpenter, the half-sister of Peter Carpenter, is a friend of my oldest sister. For years they have corresponded; so when I heard from Virginia that these people claimed to be related to the Philadelphia Carpenters, I took it upon myself to write a letter of inquiry to Miss Unadilla. She was ill at the time and some months passed before she replied. A few weeks ago I received a letter, in a part of which you may be interested."

Mrs. Millard was evidently prepared for the occasion, for she at once produced the paper in question.

"I shall be glad to hear it, but it can't alter my opinion of our friends across the street," Miss Sarah said stoutly, at which remark Miss Virginia visibly brightened.

Mrs. Millard paid no heed, but began to read.  
“‘ Of the Miss Carpenter of whom you write I know nothing. She is not related to us. My niece, May Carpenter, is my only connection of the name, as I am hers. Of my niece I know little at present. Two years ago she had a long illness which came near being fatal, since then I believe she has been abroad. As to the young woman in question, I repeat we have no cousins.’ ” Mrs. Millard looked around the circle in triumph.

“Of course,” said Miss Sarah, “there are some things difficult to explain; but the most difficult of all would be, how two young women could come into a neighborhood and make it better and happier for their presence, could nurse some of us when we were ill, and show themselves in a thousand ways helpful and kindly and companionable, and all with the utmost simplicity,—to explain how they could do all this and yet be impostors, would be harder still. The good Book says, ‘By their fruits ye shall know them,’ and that is how we know the shopkeepers.”

Wayland clapped noiselessly. “Good for auntie!” he whispered to Charlotte.

“I really don’t remember Marion’s saying she

was a cousin of Miss Carpenter," said Alex.  
"Perhaps we jumped to the conclusion."

Mrs. Millard's lips were parted to reply when an exclamation from Miss Virginia caused all eyes to turn toward the door. From the awed silence it might have been a ghost, instead of Norah Pennington in a white dress, who stood there.

She could not but be conscious of the excitement her appearance aroused. Her color deepened as for a second she felt herself the object of the silent gaze of this roomful of people. She did not lose her self-possession, however, and in another moment Charlotte was at her side, and Miss Virginia had recovered her power of speech.

"I really came in search of Alex," Norah explained, a most engaging impostor surely, as she smiled upon the assembly.

"Do you know my sister, Miss Pennington?" Miss Virginia's embarrassment was painfully evident.

"I believe I once met Mrs. Millard in the shop." There was a twinkle of mischief in Norah's demureness.

Mrs. Millard bowed distantly.

"I am going to settle this here and now," Miss Sarah whispered to Mrs. Russell as Norah crossed the room to the sofa where Alex sat. Leaning forward she said in a tone quite audible to everybody, "Norah, excuse me for asking a personal question, but did you say Miss Carpenter—Marion—was related to the Philadelphia Carpenters?"

Norah was quick-witted. So this was what they had been talking about! A glance at Mrs. Millard's haughty shoulders explained. "I think I did say so," she replied frankly.

"But Miss Unadilla says she can't be," observed Wayland in an undertone from behind her.

Norah made her decision promptly. "Miss Unadilla would not have said so if she had understood. I am going to take the liberty of explaining what has perhaps puzzled some of you. It was I who in the beginning caused the mistake, and I think now the time has come to set it right." In the faces of her friends she saw nothing but confidence.

"Some of you have perhaps already guessed that there is just one Miss Carpenter. Marion is Miss Unadilla's niece."

"I knew it! I knew it!" Charlotte whispered in an ecstasy.

Norah continued: "We had no idea of making a mystery of it; that simply happened. Marion was recovering from a long illness, which left her with a nervous affection of the eyes, so serious she felt she would lose her sight. She and I were school friends, and when she was taken ill she sent for me, and I was with her through it all. When she grew stronger, her physician felt she must have some radical change—something which would take her thoughts from herself, but nothing seemed the right thing. Then I thought of putting into execution an old plan of mine to open a shop. I coaxed her into it, and we set out to seek our fortune, just as if the rich Miss Carpenter did not exist,—or, at least, was merely our patron. We came here partly because the climate was mild, and also because I had been here before and knew about the place; and it was far enough from Miss Carpenter's home to make it unlikely she would be recognized. We took no one into our confidence except Dr. Baird, and it was generally understood that we were travelling somewhere for

Marion's health. The fiction about the rich Miss Carpenter has annoyed Marion all along; but as it came about, I didn't see how to avoid it. It really seemed better that it should not be known." Norah looked at Alex, as if seeking her opinion.

"Of course, I understand," said Alex; "go on."

"There isn't anything more, except that at the outset we were discovered by Mr. Landor, Charlotte's guardian, and an old friend of Marion's. He promised to keep our secret, and also to speak a good word for us to Miss Virginia."

"My dear, he did; and at the time I was a little surprised, but—" Miss Virginia hesitated.

Norah interrupted her. "You have all been so good to us. If Marion were here, she would join me in saying it. The best part of our venture—and it has been a success in other ways—is the friends we have made."

"You showed yourselves friendly and won us in spite of ourselves," said Miss Sarah.

"I always said there was a mystery," old Mrs. Leigh remarked. "And are you, too, a millionairess, Miss Norah?"

Norah spread out her hands in an odd little ges-

ture: "I am sorry, but I am just a plain poor person."

"Is this the end of the shop?" some one asked.

"I trust not. I have no idea of giving up, unless you drive me away," Norah answered.

Perhaps the only person present who was greatly surprised was Mrs. Millard. She had planned her little scene with some care, anticipating just such a gathering in honor of her return. To have the title rôle—as it were—snatched from her in the moment of triumph was annoying. But whatever her faults, Mrs. Millard was a lady, and as such she accepted the situation. She said little, but what she said was graceful and to the point. The eccentricity of the whole thing was, it seemed to her, sufficient excuse for her attitude, which, now she understood, she regretted.

"Did you want anything in particular of me, Norah?" Alex asked as they were leaving.

"Yes," was the answer. "I want you to be my partner."

"Norah!" Alex cried. "You know I'll be glad, glad to be; but, oh, I am sorry for you, if you must lose Marion."

## CHAPTER THIRTIETH

### CHANGES

“**W**AS I not right to come? You said a year, and that is over.”

“I did not expect you so soon.” Marion smiled over the great bunch of wild sunflowers she held. Coming in a few minutes earlier she had found Francis Landor pacing impatiently back and forth. Something, perhaps it was the unexpectedness of it, made her a trifle stately.

It seemed to Francis that those flaunting yellow flowers made a barrier between them. “It was only by chance I found you. Charlotte gave me a hint. How long did you intend to leave me in uncertainty? Was it quite fair?”

“I have been in uncertainty myself; happily my fears have not been realized. I did what seemed best at the time, and please remember the year is only just over.” Marion looked at him gravely from behind her flowery screen.

“I did not mean to begin by reproaching you,”

he said, drawing nearer. "But you cannot realize what it has meant to be left in complete ignorance. Even now I don't understand why you are here." He glanced about the room.

"Norah Pennington and I are living here, earning our daily bread — really doing it," — she laughed a little; "and, as you see, it has made me over. It was Norah's plan, and you can see how we were obliged to keep it to ourselves, if it was to be carried out. I had to cut loose from everything, — the suspense about my eyes was killing me. Of course, looking back, it seems needless; but one cannot argue with nerves."

She paused a moment, then continued: "There is one thing I want to explain at the beginning. This winter's experience has made a different person of me. I can never go back to the old life of a society woman, with perhaps a little charitable work thrown in. I want to come in touch with people — all sorts of people. I want to try experiments. I think I must have inherited some of my grandfather's business instincts. I haven't made any very definite plans, but I should like to start other shops such as this, where women who have some ability and the gift for making useful and

beautiful things can find their opportunity. I shall make mistakes, and lose money perhaps, but I want to experiment. I want you to understand how I feel, before — before — ” Marion’s eyes shone, a lovely flush was on her face as she hesitated.

Francis Landor took sudden possession of the yellow flowers, tossing them with scant courtesy on the table, and leaning forward he grasped her hands. “ May, what has this to do with it? Does it crowd me out of your life? Since you were a little girl, since the days when we played together, you have been my help and inspiration. Do you mean this has come between us, or do you still care? ”

Tears shone in Marion’s eyes; she bent her head till it touched his shoulder. “ Francis, I do care — I have always cared; I told Charlotte to tell you.”

“ You will forgive me if I am only half glad to see you, Mr. Landor,” was Norah’s greeting a little later. “ Susanna, now, is wholly delighted. She sees the end of what has been to her a long exile, but I must needs go in search of another partner.”

"Why not take me in as a third, Miss Norah? I believe I should like it."

"I shouldn't," she replied, laughing. "It would end in my playing third fiddle, and you must know this place is *Norah's Ark*; I am chief manager." She went off gayly, pausing at the door to ask, "You do not mind my speaking to Alex to-night, Marion?"

What happened in the course of her search for Alex, we have already seen.

The two in the shop were left undisturbed. It must have been nearly ten o'clock, which was considered late in the Terrace, when a voice was heard insisting, "I must see Miss Marion, Susanna, just for a minute. Is she here?" and Charlotte burst into the room.

"Oh, Miss Marion, I had half guessed, — I was not quite sure. Oh, I am so glad!" Oblivious to the presence of any one else she threw her arms about Miss Carpenter, who had risen hastily as she entered.

"What are you talking about, dearie?" she asked, returning the embrace of the excited girl.

"Where is that message you were told to deliver to me, Charlotte?" Mr. Landor demanded.

"Cousin Frank!" she cried, releasing Marion, "where did you come from?" Then glancing from one to the other, she added, "But you didn't wait for it. Oh, I am so glad!"

"You are a tremendous goose, Charlotte," said Marion, but she laughed. In fact they all three laughed a great deal in the course of the next few minutes.

"I have never exactly understood how you came to be so wise on this subject, Charlotte," Mr. Landor said, making her sit beside him.

"You know you never could keep anything to yourself, Francis," Miss Carpenter remarked reproachfully.

Charlotte looked mischievous. "The beginning of it was when I found those verses about the rose that was out of reach, and you were so provoked I thought they must mean something. Then Aunt Cora said —"

"Never mind Aunt Cora," Francis said, laughing; "this will do."

"I agree with you," remarked Marion.

"Charlotte, Miss Virginia is standing at the door. I know she is distracted over your absence," said Norah, entering.

"She knows I am here, but I mustn't stay," she rose regretfully.

Francis accompanied her. "And so you think your Miss Carpenter is lovelier than mine?" he remarked, as they crossed the street.

"Well, at least she is just as lovely," Charlotte answered blithely.

The news spread quickly. The Terrace was stirred to its depths. Life within its quiet borders was becoming exciting. The announcement of Madelaine's engagement with all the splendors in prospect would have sufficed for one season, but even this was eclipsed by the romance of the shop,—so named by Mrs. Leigh.

"Look like I already knowed Miss Marion was a rich lady," Aunt Belle was heard to declare. "Yes'm, she done carry her haid so proud-like."

In the shop many a serious conference was held by Marion, Norah, and Alexina, and at length Miss Sarah was called in. As a result, another surprise was sprung upon the Terrace. The corner shop was to be given up—Norah could not live there alone—and a new one opened in the spacious drawing-rooms of the Leigh house.

Here there would be room to expand, Norah would have a home, and Miss Sarah would be freed from the necessity of boarders. There were those who held moreover that by this arrangement the enterprise acquired a new dignity. The idea originated with Mrs. Millard, who, while she did not give the shop her full approval, from henceforth withdrew all opposition.

Old Mrs. Leigh was heard to remark that she had in her life done many things she had not expected to do, but living over a shop was about the last.

"I suppose you'll agree it is better than the poorhouse, or even boarders," said her niece.

"Better? I am as proud of it as I can be," the old lady replied, and proud of it she seemed.

Norah called her their advertising agent. Her acquaintance was extensive, and at church or on the street, wherever she happened to be, she waylaid her friends and gave them a cordial invitation to visit *our* shop. On more than one occasion she constituted herself hostess. Recognizing from her window a familiar carriage, she would descend, dainty and bright-eyed, to enjoy a social chat, which would sometimes result in her holding a

reception, for everybody enjoyed her merry talk, and she was quickly made the centre of an interested group.

Miss Sarah was inclined to interfere, but Norah and Alex protested. They liked to have her. She was an added attraction. But all this was afterward.

It was on the last evening, as they walked arm in arm around the dismantled shop, that Marion said: "I am selfish about it, but I could not have endured to go away and have you go on without me in this dear little place where we have been so happy. How wonderfully everything has worked out! and it was all your doing."

"I don't know; I think we owe a great deal to our friend the rich Miss Carpenter." There was a mist in Norah's eyes, but she smiled.









